

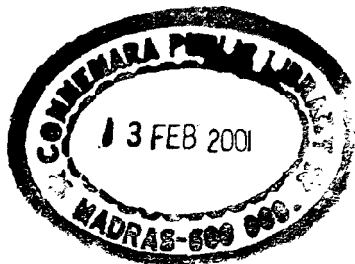


A PIECE OF CHARCOAL

Dr.M.VARATHARASANAR

Translated by
G.Balasubramanian

கரித்துண்டு



A PIECE OF CHARCOAL

Dr. M. VARADHARASANAR

Translated from the Tamil Original

By

G. BALASUBRAMAINAN



TAMIL ILAKKIYA SANGAPPALAGAI KURAL PEEDAM

38-D, Akbarabad II Street,
Kodambakkam,
Chennai - 600 024.

2000

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M. KARUNANIDHI
Chief Minister



Secretariat,
Chennai - 600 009.

26.12.2000

Foreward

It gives me immense pleasure to know that there are several erudite Tamil scholars who do remarkable research, touching the various aspects of Tamil like its ancient history, antiquity, grammar and poetry, not to mention the creative literature. In this direction their service is indeed commendable.

If we ask whether these varied works including the creative literature are being read, appreciated and saved by the Tamils, the answer is a regrettable no. In this connection we have a rich legacy in all fields of Tamil. It is our legitimate duty to safeguard them because they are the invaluable treasures handed down to us by our forefathers.

Out of a population of 6 crores and 20 lakhs in Tamil Nadu, only a handful of them are engaged in this safeguarding task. It such is the case with us, how can we expect the non-Tamils elsewhere to be conversant with the greatness and glory of our Tamil literature? We have to admit honestly that we have miserably failed in the mission of spreading Tamil literature in four corners of the earth.

Let us strive to make the foreigners realize the inexhaustible treasure of our writings. Let us try to render the works of renowned scholars of other nations into Tamil. These two utmost efforts are unique in nature.

In this regard we thought to set up a government body with a view to accomplishing these two tasks. The result was the establishment of Tamil Sangapallagai Kural Peedam.

An anthology of 16 Tamil stories selected for publication along with the novel *Karithundu* (A Piece of Charcoal) by Dr.M.Varadarasanar have been translated. I am happy to know that, along with them, my

historical novel **Then Pandi Singam** (The Lion of the South) has also been translated into five languages, namely, English, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam and Kanada. On my behalf Dr. M. Tamilkudimaghan, Minister for Tamil Development , has been ably guiding the Kural Peedam in its proper functioning. The Special Officer Dr. C. Nagarajan has completed the scheme of translation work successfully. In this context it is my bounded duty to appreciate them for their full-fledged work.

Dr.M. Varadarasanar was a reputed Tamil scholar. He was also a creative writer. During our earlier regime we made him the Vice-Chancellor of Madurai Kamaraj University twice in order to recognize his excellence and eminence. He had also headed a Government Committee to write the history of Tamil Nadu in a fitting manner. The work started in 1972 is nearing completion now.

As a prolific writer, Dr.M. Varadarasanar has more than sixty works to his credit : short stories, novels, plays and commentaries. Among his novels the worth-mentioning are : **Kallo Kaviamo?** (Palm wine or Epic?), **Agal Vilaku** (Clay Lamp), **Malar Vizhi** and the *magnum opus* is **Karithundu** (A Piece of Charcoal)

I ponder over why this novel, **Karithundu** is still attracting the attention of Tamil scholars.

It marvels at a beautiful style of Tamil prose. He has employed simple words and phrases to convey his ideas. He depicts the conversation of the slum people in their own style without any corruption or deviation. The conversation runs like a pristine pure water flowing in a stream which is really enchanting to read.

In **A Piece of Charcoal** (**Karithundu**) the affairs of the state and nation, the ups and downs in society, the existence of the rich and the poor side by side, economic inequality and universal thinking are all discussed threadbare. In fact they are discussed in detail minutely. The novel has a well-knit story bubbling with excessive sorrows and sufferings, uncontrollable grief and anguish.

“Do you know that many of these poor people are leading a very virtuous life? Those who look at these poor folks from a distance may not be able to find out the truths.”

“If, among the hutments of the poor, there is a family living peacefully, then we can very well presume that they have enough food to eat and to quench their thirst of physical need too.”

The novel is remarkable for its striking thoughts and cosmopolitan view points which flow out spontaneously. He guides us properly for our emancipation from all ills in our life.

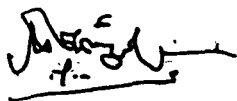
“I am very clear about one thing. There are two ways to uplift the poor. One way is to abolish the different classes such as the poor and the rich and bring into existence the egalitarian society by declaring poverty as a crime. The other way is that people in higher strata of society should make it a point to mix and mingle with the poor and the under-privileged. They should show sympathy and mercy to the poor and try to correct their follies. The first way is like constructing a new house in the place of an old one. The second way is like repairing the old house.”

“However it may be, even if we have the sound truth to substantiate our view-point, we shouldn’t be angry and hasty. We must certainly observe patience. You cannot change the world overnight. You can do it only in a phased manner. How many centuries have gone before we could get democracy and republic system of governance? What quantum of development of civilization was needed before we could reach a stage where universal adult franchise was made possible. How long a period had gone by!

Moreover, the novel abounds with sagacious thoughts and wise sayings. It is worth-mentioning here that incidents and happenings in the novel move our hearts in such a way that we have to shed tears of sorrow.

In fine this fiction is altogether a novel effort to refine human beings with a mind of a seer and sage declaring war against eradication of poverty.

Long live M. Varadarasanar



M. Karunanidhi.

Dr.M.TAMILKUDIMAGHAN

M.A. Ph.D.,



Minister for
Tamil Official Language,
Tamil Culture, Hindu Religious
& Charitable Endowments

Secretariat,
Chennai - 600 009.

28.12.2000

Preface

Dr. M. Varadarasanar was my learned professor. He taught me *Literary Principles* in the University of Madras. He had a lasting affection for me. As the Vice-Chancellor of Madurai Kamaraj University, he made a personal visit to a place at Paramakudi where a college was to be opened.

Hon'ble Chief Minister Kalaingar Karunanidhi constituted a Government Committee to write the authentic history of Tamil Nadu in 1972. Dr M. Varadarasanar was appointed the Chairman of the Committee. Now it is under my control. The tremendous work is nearing completion with the final chapter, **Tamil Nadu after Independence**.

Dr.M. Varadarasanar was a prominent prolific writer. Among his novels **Karithundu** (A Piece of Charcoal) is a remarkable one. Some critics say that in his novels the part of the story is shorter and the part dealing with advice and description is longer so that easy flow is marred. Of course we can agree with these critics' view. The part regarding advice and description is a little longer. On that account we cannot dismiss the part in question as altogether unnecessary.

Dr. M. Varadarasanar was a great scholar. He projects himself as a character in his novels invariably and puts forth his lofty ideas through that character. We have to accept them for their high pragmatism. He imparts us the art and the right ways of living, the undercurrent of his novels.

The sum and substance of the whole story is this. Mohan was a popular artist in Calcutta. Nirmala was a graduate with modern and progressive outlook. Both of them loved each other and got married. He was devoted to his craft whereas she was more extravagant and showy. These two extremes were the cause for their separation in life.

Mohan lost both his legs in a gruesome accident. He came to Chennai to earn his livelihood. He resided in a slum. He was fortunate to have Ponni as his life partner. They led a very simple life. Mohan had

drawing as his avocation. He drew pictures in street corners with a piece of charcoal. He also satisfied with the meagre daily earnings.

Nirmala went to Bombay. She became a teacher. She developed her proficiency in Thirukkural. She moved with good people. Her acquaintance with a professor from Chennai made her live with him.

Thiruvengadam, a friend of the professor got introduced to Mohan the artist. Nirmala was shocked to see the pathetic condition of Mohan. Her conscience pricked her to know that she was the cause for the sufferings of Mohan. To console herself she wrote a long letter to Mohan reminding him of the past and the present. More or less it was a letter of confession. She left the professor's house. Mohan lost both his legs in the accident. It was really pitiable to look at him. Though he was deceived in life, some good people helped him. The conversation of Thiruvengadam and the talks of the professor elucidate universal truths and laudable ideas. The same with Kumaresan with regard to labour world.

The lengthy letter of Nirmala narrates the period of separation in which there is a wide gap in her life at Calcutta and Chennai.

Dr.M.Varadarasanar was not only a great scholar but also a perfect pragmatist. It is his firm conviction that the Tamils should lead a good life. In this connection the following is his pen - portrait.

"I told her that, if these hard-working Tamils had not developed and progressed in these forty or sixty years of their living there and if they were seen to be lesser in their living standards than the living conditions of the refugees who had come over there recently, there must be some basic flaws in the life of Tamils. Of course there were many flaws in them and the foremost among them was the absence of unity; they had immense capability to go on splitting within themselves based on trivial reasons and they were a lot with jealousy unbound" (chapter 14)

Even today the Tamils are pitiable waning themselves for impertinent reasons. They are on a dangerous war-path who may lead to their ruin. In this context it will be wiser on their part if they follow the high ideals of Dr.M.Varadarasanar that he puts forth in this novel.

An emotional lady can never arrive at wise decisions. As a result she may go astray in her life. This was the bitter experience of Nirmala in her earlier life. The same Nirmala now leads an exemplary saintly life at

Chennai. What a world of difference between the two extremes in her life!

For this purpose we have to read one more portion of her letter.

“The Nirmala who was then, was entirely different from the Nirmala who is at present. She lived a life with the thinking that womanhood was nothing but good physique, fashionable jewels and beauty. She was the wife of a Bengali artist, who was engulfed in the world of art. She gave regard to pomp and luxury ; she never knew what was sacrifice and she was the old Nirmala. This Nirmala, the new one, had very well realised that, apart from the beauty of a good body structure, why even more than that, the beauty of the mind was also necessary. This Nirmala is the wife of an intellectual Tamilian who had gone deep into the sea of knowledge. She had learnt how to respect and reciprocate affection and a lady well aware of the life, you would please condemn the old Nirmala, hate her and reject her” (Chapter 14)

Dr.M. Varadarasanar’s passion for the poor was indeed great. Their life moved his heart very much.

“My mind at once, thought of Ponni ; my mind thought about her hand-affectionate hand - which was just picking up and arranging in rows charcoal bits that could well be used for drawing with abiding interest” (chapter 11 repeated in 14)

Fully aware of the outstanding merits of this novel, the Kural peedam has selected this one for translation and publication with the unanimous consent of the Members of the Executive Committee who are all veteran scholars and writers. The rendering is in English, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada.

As a student of Dr.M. Varadarasanar I deem it a great privilege and pleasure to write a foreword to this outstanding work. I equally take pride to accomplish this task under the able guidance of our revered Kalaignar Karunanidhi. I profusely thank him for having given a fitting foreword to this novel. In this connection I appreciate the sincere efforts of the Special Officer Dr.C.Nagarajan for having published this useful translation work in time.



Dr.M.Tamilkudimaghan.

Dr. C. NAGARAJAN
M.A.M.Phil, Ph.D.,
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29.12.2000

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

Tamil Sangappalagai Kural Peedam was set up by Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Dr. Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi on 1.4.1999, with an objective of proliferation of creative literature in Tamil, for the promotion and development of Tamil Language and Literature, keeping in view the keen interest shown by Tamil Scholars, Savants, Creative writers and ardent lovers of Tamil.

The Excellence of Tamil Language and Literature, its antiquity, the richness and wealth of Literature and Grammar, Tamil culture, the Gallantry and Love which are considered as the two eyes of the Tamils in the life traditions, have to be read and understood by peoples of other states as well as other nations. For this purpose, our wealth of Tamil Literature has to be reproduced in the respective languages of other states and nations. Realising the fact that this endeavour has not been taken up so far, we proposed to translate and publish Tamil Literary works into other languages. Bharati the greatest poet of Tamil Renaissance had given the clarion call thus:

"We shall endeavour to reproduce great works
Of reputed scholars of other nations into Tamil"

In order to visualise his dream, we also proposed to translate literary works of other languages into Tamil. Eminent authority on Translation, Dr. Kuhiwczak speaks thus: "Translation is like a life-line that not only passess information but also changes the sensibility and is judged in the same way as any other literary text. Translators

who are not bound by rules but ethics, need to look into the lesser known languages to communicate to a wider spectrum".* These words will speak for the aim and objective of our venture.

As stated earlier, with our objective to disseminate the wealth of Tamil Literature to others, this year, in the initial phase, we have translated and published two novels from Tamil to English, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi.

They are: (1) 'The Lion of the South' by Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and Elderly Scholar-Statesman of our times; and (2) 'A Piece of Charcoal' (Karithundu (கரித்துண்டு) in Tamil) by Dr. M. Varadharasanar, an outstanding scholar - writer of Tamil Nadu, who had great many achievements in creative writings including the Sahitya Academy Award.

The second novel, which presently adorns your hands is 'A Piece of Charcoal' (கரித்துண்டு by Dr. M. Varadharasanar) was translated by Thiru G. Balasubramanian, Deputy Director of Translations, Tamil Development, Culture Dept. Secretariat, Chennai. He has to his credit more than of 30 years of experience in Translations. A poet, orator and literary critic, he is known as poet **Kaanavan** in Tamil Literary circle.

I shall also immensely thank the erudite scholars Prof. Dr. Chellappan and Prof. Dr. Ramani who lent me very great helping hand in getting the translation of "A Piece of Charcoal" perused thoroughly, and bringing out it as a perfectly finished product. I express my sincere thanks to these eminent professors for their unique service in bringing out this publication.

We can proudly acclaim that there are scholars who are mighty creative writers who could produce novels in Tamil that

* An interview with Dr. Piotr Kuhiwczak - vide the "The Hindu" dated 1.6.1997 Weekly Edition-3 pp.IX.

could very well be compared with creative writings of any other languages of the world. Novels like this will be continue to be published. This is one among the project works of Tamil Ilakiya Sangap Palagai Kural Peedam. Through such ventures in the offing in future, the best of the greatest creations of the creative writers in Tamil will be continued to be published subsequently and early. These noble efforts will enable people's of other languages and other nations to read and understand the dynamism of Tamil language and Tamil culture and the creative ability of Tamil writers.

I am greatly indebted to Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi who himself is personification of Tamil, who is a great Tamil scholar of unmatched excellence and also, to Hon'ble Minister Dr. M. Tamil Kudimagan, Minister for Tamil official Language Tamil Culture and Hindu Religious Endowment for their evincing interest, enthusiasm encouragement for carrying out the programmes of Tamil Sangap Palagai Kural Peedam without relent.

I also express my sincere thanks to Dr. S.S. Ramar Ilango, Director, International Institute of Tamil Studies, for his unstinted co-operation and kind and valuable assistance rendered at every stages of preparation, and publication of this work.

I whole heartedly express my gratitude for all the members of the General Council of Kural Peedam who were supporting the cause of publication of this novel, providing us with every kind of cooperation possible. I express my heartfelt thanks to Thiru Natarajan, Thiru M. Kannan of Tamil Etymological Dictionary Project and Dr. N. Chandrasekaran who were providing me valuable suggestions and assistance in bringing out this book. I do recognize the hard and unstinted work of the staff members of Tamil Sangap Palagai Kural Peedam for rendering all possible assistance so that this book shall come out with all perfection at the appointed time.

I express my thanks to *Sivabala's* DTP Centre Thiruvallikkeni, for having carefully typeset manuscripts of the translation. The material was very meticulously converted and prepared as pages by the staff of International Institute of Tamil Studies, - Tmt. R. Vennila.

I thank the nanavr@eth.net who have designed the wrapper beautifully. I express my thanks for Messers. United Bind Graphics for having printed the book elegantly.

I hope and believe that Tamils here and every where will welcome and extend their support to this work as well as all other publications that are to be brought out subsequently by Kural Peedam

C. Nagarajan

Translator's Introduction

Like every other contemporary research scholars on translation, Richards in his essay "Towards a Theory of Translation" profusely quotes from Eugénie A. Nida, whose famous lines are as follows:

"Translating is probably the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of cosmos".

These words will amply explain in detail the uniquenesses as well as the immensity of an endeavour of translation.

Dr. M. Varadharasanar was an outstanding Scholar of his time; an eminent Professor of Tamil, a great exponent of Sangam Literature; a versatile essayist and a prolific writer who excelled in creative writings, who has to his credit 13 Novels, a host of short stories and Dramas too. His excellence of scholastic acumen in Tamil language and Literature is well recognised and understood by Tamils every where.

When, the enormous task of translating his Novel "A Piece of Charcoal" (Karithundu - கரித்துண்டு in Tamil) from Tamil to English was entrusted to me, I deemed it a very great privilege and a honour bestowed upon me. Because, the novel "A Piece of Charcoal" was altogether a product of very different and strange mould.

Nearly five decades have passed since the plot of the novel was conceived and reduced into writing. Though a few things touched by the author then, have now become obsolete by efflux of time, there are certain other things which still remain to this date as fresh and vibrant as they were then.

This novel was then considered as a product of moiric thoughts of the author, because, he touched upon many subjects which were never thought of even remotely by the writers of 1950's

in Tamil. Even many radical thinkers and rationalists have not touched at all those subjects at one single work, ever produced by them. That was why, it was hailed and celebrated as a master piece and revolutionary novel as evaluated a little later. This novel contained topics of varied interest which were brought to heated public debates later, and then recognised and absorbed by the society and the state as well.

The author, Dr. Varatharasanar was a very great thinker and philosopher and a social reformist of Tamil Nadu; he had elaborately dealt with in this novel about Poverty, Illiterary, Elections, Adult Franchise, Democracy, Republic, State Authority and Monopoly of Trade Practices, Marketing, Industrial growth, Protection of Handlooms and Handicrafts, Unemployment, and Subsistence Allowance to Unemployd Fine Arts, Slum Clearance, Shelter Upgradation, Town Planning, Abolition of superstitions, Marriages and Morals, Aetheism, the paradox of Coexistence of Rich and the Poor and its bad impacts and Egalitarian Society.

He also touched about the boundaries of the state. Particularly the northern boundary of Tamil Nadu which was a clear lesson in the Political History of Tamil Nadu. He was very much moved by the plight of the poor Tamils from Ramanathapuram who moved to Taravi, considered even now the largest slum of Asia in Mumbai (Bombay). He mourns (in chapter 14) that the Refugees of Panjab and Bengal (dislocated by partisan) were better placed in Mumbai than the Tamils in Taravi there through, the words of Nirmala.

The hero and heroine - Artist Mohan and Nirmala - were husband and wife who started their life with dreams in Calcutta. They were separated by not 'Cruel Fate' alone, but also by their 'temperamental incompatibility', as stated in their words of confessions.

They separately reached Tamil Nadu in different conditions and context at different times. Mohan now a lame man lies in a slum with a young widow . Nirmala lives as a wife to a learned professor, without their marriage being solemnised. Thiruvengkatam the inquisitive young man and his friend Kumaresan a young man who dreams for the visualisation of marxism are alone the leading characters in this novel.

It appears as though the auother wanted to **draw a Charter against Poverty, Illiteracy, Urban Slums, Economic offences, the Obscene Display of Wealth and its Accumulation, Exploitation of Labour, and Evils of Unemployment, and last but not the least, the Material and Moral abandonment of Orphened and Deserted Children.**

The book, in a way, may also be aptly considered as a work on the **propagation of the Greatness of Thirukkural, the Scripture of Tamil**, and the auother has profusely quoted from it. I have truthfully followed the author and presented almost all the quotes from Thirukkural in the foot notes with Translations from Drew and Lazaures. Several other foot notes are intended to throw light on the context about the men and matters, landscape and other needed informations. They may kindly be taken as supplemental reading; their authenticity has been verified to the extent possible. (If any shortfall has occurred, the inquisitive reader may kindly bear with the translator.)

While defining the role of the translator **Nida** in his "*A Frame Work for the Analysis and Evaluation of Theories of Translation*" has told thus: "In addition to competence and skill in verbal communication, a translator must have at least three other characteristics he is to excel in his work. **First**, he needs to have a sincere admirations for the formal features of the work to be

translated, for without this, he is unlikely to possess either the patience or the insights necessary to reproduce a fully adequate equivalent. **Second**, he should have a respect for the content of the text, or else, he is likely to short change the message. **Third**, he must be willing to express his own creativity through someone else's creation." I have sincerely attempted to follow the definition to the extent possible, while I wish to say that the translation is aimed primarily to Indian Readers in taking the spirit and message of this novel and then to readers every where.

As I stated earlier, it was a great privilege bestowed upon me, to undertake translating of this novel in to English, by Tamil Sangap Palagai Kural Peedam. But I was also aware of the fact that this great duty has been ordained on my frail shoulders. However, I drew inspirations from my late professor of Tamil in Degree Classes Prof. AR.S. Narayanaswamy Naidu who had translated some of the Dramas of Shakespere, a Veteran Tamil Scholar of Repute (A close friend and contemporary of Dr. M. Varadarasanar.); from my English Prof. G.J. William's teachings, who had taught me to read the English classics, particularly Novels of Thomas Hardy.

I shall be ever grateful to two great noble soul, who are Veteran Scholars in both English and Tamil. They are Dr. K. Chellappan and prof. Dr. N. Ramani. Their eminence and excellence are acclaimed by everyone. Dr. Ramani is a master of thoroughness and perfection who has very kindly gone through my translation with patience and has contributed a lot for its improvement and betterment. Revered Dr. Chellappan, Director of State English Institute, Chennai, has been my guiding spirit who has given me a lot of encouragement, suggestions, and guidance so that the originality of the theme is truthfully preserved with all its fervor in its translation into English. He has given a

thorough reading to make it perfect of the climax part of the novel i.e. the 14th (last) chapter and has brought to its present form. I owe the credit of perfection to both of them; and, if there are still some improvements needed, I plead the readers shall bear with me.

I am much indebted to revered Dr. Kalaigiar M. Karunanidhi, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, and Chairman, Tamil Sangap Palagai-Kural Peedam for having kindly chosen me to venture upon the rendition of "A Piece of Charcoal" (கரித்துண்டு). I express my gratitude to the respected and Hon'ble, Dr. M. Tamilkudimaganar, Minister for Official Language Tamil, Tamil Culture and Religious Endowment for having kindly drawn me to take up this noble and great venture. His dedication to the cause of Tamil Development through Translation is a great source of inspiration for us.

I am very much thankful to respected Dr. C. Nagarajan, Special Officer, Tamil Sangap Palagai Kural Peedam, for the encouragement and enthusiasm given by him. At every stage of this great task from the beginning to its successful completion, he has given me the freedom in selecting the type font and page editing too, while showing great concern that the printing and publishing of the book shall be of high standard.

I Sincerely thank one and all who have poured care and affection on so that I shall successfully complete this endeavour.

Place: Secretariat,
Chennai-9.

G. BALASUBRAMANIAN
Deputy Director of Translations

Date: 21-2-2000

A Piece of Charcoal

1

A walk from Pachaiappa's Building to Parry's Corner in Chennai, will bring into light many a fact and truth in life to any person who seeks them, provided, the person who ventures to walk so, should have his eyes and ears well trained in the art of learning the messages of life. He should have exercised thoroughly to infer things through the scenes and conversations that might be laid before him. If so, he will certainly receive benefit from them. We can vouchsafe, that the wide world is spanned between the Pachaiappa's and the Parry's Corner. I can tell you assuredly, that on each day I ventured to walk that stretch I did learn more and more new and fresh lessons. Just as I would be back home with hand-loads of heavy bags, so also, I would be returning home on such days with new and enriching experiences gained through my eyes and ears which had invariably loaded my brain. This has been my usual routine on many days, and there was one such day, which was unforgettably impressed with such an experience. That day had brought in many important changes in my life; it has redefined my life-course, making me born afresh.

It must be six o'clock that evening. The sun had just set; yet, its diffused light at dusk was spread everywhere. The street lights were aglow; but, their light was so dim. I had come walking a long way from Pachaiappa's. I just crossed the cutting to 'Broadway' which was narrow in true sense. I had also passed a lot of shops, and had come almost in front of the High Court. As I was just walking along, I happened to see some people gathered in a group and gazing down on the ground. Quite often, it was an usual sight on the streets of Chennai, that some seven or eight people would be standing in a group and groping and gazing at a corner of the sky. It will all begin thus: at first, one individual would stand looking at the sky above. He might be gazing in search of the crescent, (the 3rd phase of the waxing moon), or else, he might be looking for the place of Venus on the sky. Sometimes, he might be sending his eyes in an unknown direction, in search of the rotating light house perched on the tallest dome of the High Court.*

* A new light House was built and was commissioned in the early seventies (1970s) opposite to A.I.R. Station, Chennai. Until then the light house was functioning from the High Court.

Immediately, someone would arrive there, and ask him, standing by his side: "Sir, what are you searching for?" So saying he would also gaze up in that direction. Even before the former would answer his query, some two or three more would arrive there and sooner the crowd would enlarge. Somebody would be explaining the reason therefor to someone-else who might not be interested. The whole crowd-then would be gazing eagerly in that direction. By this time, the first man, who was the origin of this snowballing effect of crowd, whether aware of or not, of the foolhardiness of these people, would have left the place, without uttering a word. Sometimes, the cause and effect of these gatherings might be attributed to the tricks, of the deceitful pickpocketeers, (thieves who would stealthily pick from others pockets with their nimble fingers) to reap a good harvest by trapping the gullible people into a large assembly. We do not know, which of these causes, was true. Groups and gatherings groping and gazing at a corner of the sky above, will be a common sight in major bazaar streets in Chennai. But, on that particular evening, people gathered in a group there were not gazing with their heads lifted high up at the sky above. Instead, their heads were bent, gazing on the ground. This was, exactly, a big surprise to me.

But, they were not actually looking at an empty ground; they were looking at the lines drawn with a piece of charcoal. Once I eyed upon the lines drawn with charcoal on the ground, the surprise which struck me earlier was gone. I thought that the madness of the people of Chennai, might be making them to look upwards on the sky on some days, and on some other days it might be making them to look downwards. I felt that just as these people crowded together to look at the sky without any reason, they would have gathered to gaze upon the ground.

Line drawings of the faces of some ladies were seen- drawn in charcoal. Some drawings of children's faces were also seen. There we could see the high-rise domes of the High Court amidst the line drawings. On one side, the majestic and inspiring face of the national leader, V.O.Chidambaram Pillai* was drawn with his imposing headgear and moustache. I thought that some aimless guy has drawn these figures here, on the ground – that too the pathway - which usually people trod upon.

And this crowd has stood around to gaze at them. I heard from some of those people, standing around, who admired and commented, talking to each other as follows:

* Celebrated leader from Tamil Nadu a Veteran freedom fighter who was reverentially addressed as "Kappalottiya Thamizhan" - The Great Tamil who first launched a merchandise ship. He was also known as the 'Thilak' of the South India.

“Ah, how beautifully he has drawn!”

“That too, he has drawn with the help of a mere piece of charcoal, so beautifully!”

“A genius in craftsmanship needs no special tools”.

“Of course, it is truly said!”

“But, then, should he draw the faces of revered great men on the ground where people ceaselessly walk?”

“Let those who walk, do so, with their eyes wide open”

“Poor guy, bereft of canvas and wall, he seizes this place, which is the only available space to draw”.

“Let him go to the Fort St. George Parade Ground and draw these there”.

“Who will go over there to look at his drawings?”

“Leave alone looking at, can he earn, by drawing there?”

“Oh, after all, does this end, in begging for alms?”

“Even a thousand skills displayed, are to earn a livelihood”.

“Art is great, because, it is art!”

“Be it displayed by a beggar, the greatness of art is always there!”

“If only there is an exclusive newspaper, with a party backing, and a large gathering of graduates to hail this art, they will shower him with money in thousands”.

“But, then, can we stand, quite close him to view and enjoy his art like this?”

“Then, ministers, rich and privileged and the elite alone will be encircling him and shaking hands with him. Good mother fortune will favour him greatly”.

“In such a day, the elite will talk in praise of him in bombastic words; they will not be pouring their real kindness and affection like us. Don’t you know that?”

“What do you say, will this affection and kindness of us feed him? When those elite praise his art, the value of his art is elevated to new heights.”

"You shall not be so gullible as to be deceived so cheaply. As every individual is unique, each one develops one or the other skill. But, giving up one's self respect altogether, it is not possible for everybody to come to the street, and beg like this".

"That is the real truth. Well said".

When my eyes and ears were so engaged, feeding upon the expressions and statements of those people crowded there, I experienced a peculiar blend of odours near me, a bad odour of sweat mixed with the sweet scent of sappota fruits. When I turned my head in that direction, I saw a fruit vendor with his basket. He was black in colour. His basket contained a few sappota fruits on one side (perhaps left unsold) and his head gear cloth on the other side. When I looked upon him deeply he spoke to me. "Sir, We toil the whole day, carrying head load of fruits from street to street, shouting for takers. Then, Sir, we are not blessed with anything as 'earning'. But, Sir, you all here, admiringly view this lame man, and raining upon him with coins".

"Who is that lame man?" I asked him.

"Here, is the lame man sitting on the earth, who has marred the good pathway criss – cross with his charcoal-lines", he said.

"Lame? the man who has drawn these pictures?"

"Yes sir, it is he who is sitting down there. We use to see him here every day. See, his hand is full with coins", so saying he showed me to a person who was in a corner of the road.

Looking down at the corner, I saw the artist who appeared there, **abject poverty personified**, his one hand is holding out the tool of the art - **a piece of charcoal**- the other hand full of coins. Somebody from the onlookers, threw before him a coin (a quarter-of-an-anna). Before he could pick up that coin someone threw another big coin (two annas) which fell down there. Next, someone threw down another coin (half an – anna), and somebody else dropped half-a- rupee. The artist picked both the coins without raising his bent head. He neither took pains to look for the hands which dropped the coins nor did he care to thank them. I felt that he was possessed with the exalted arrogance as it was generally attributed to all artists. However, I was too glad that he has a heart which treated alike both the hands, ie, the one which threw a small coin (Quarter – anna) and the other which dropped a big coin (half-a-rupee). As his arrogance did not give way, or come down, even while the amount offered had increased, I realised that it was the real one, inseparable from a true artist, and I hailed it.

After some time, the artist just moved from his place a little, and then only I came to know that he had lost his legs. Though his waist-cloth looked dirty, it was not worn out and torn. He had not draped any cloth on his chest-no shirt and no headgear too. Though lean, he was not frail and bleak with shrunk skin and protruding bones. His complexion was but brown. I could not look upon his eyes as he did not raise up his bent head. I could say that there was some sort of charm in his face. However, as he has not kept his hair dressed and combed with oil, the charm in his face is not well displayed. Perhaps, the moustache and the beard, which have grown in the face haphazardly, might have led to over shadowing the charm in the face. By nature, every artist is endowed with emotions bubbling up; but, we can discern nothing of that sort in him. The care-free and nonchalant attitude of those who are engaged in menial work in streets alone could be discerned in him.

When he started to draw lines and sketches, which formed to show, figures, I noticed the fingers in his hands. Those fingers were slender as those of a woman; and they were also long. Those hands did not appear to have grown rough with hard manual work. A spirit of bubbling activity,- that was completely absent in his body, -is clearly visible then, in the nimble fingers' quick and fast movements.

Until now, I was taken over by the 'bouquets and brick-bats' that were being thrown upon him by the words of those who stood surrounding him; I was also eagerly looking at the outward appearance of this humble artist. Only now, I began to be enthralled at the sight of the creativity of the spontaneous art. If we resort to trace out a figure on a paper placed upon a picture already drawn by somebody, our hands would find it difficult to copy it exactly. Here is a hand, which darts along the hard and uneven surface of the ground with a small piece of charcoal; it goes on drawing varieties of a new pictures with simple lines; never once it is stalled by even a bit of unsteadiness; and it never stays back or hesitates to parry a minute, this way or that way. The performance is ceaseless and steady, and carefree and forthright, as a child would go on drawing lines, never once halting for a moment to think about. We can say that before the flickering of the eyes, the lines are drawn fast and bring forth the figures of the pictures. It seems as though he draws aimlessly and without anything in mind. But within a few seconds those curves and lines begin to form the 'pallav' of the saree of a woman. The hand moves to draw a few lines here and there at each corner which resembles a creeper with a flower. We are unable to predict even until a few seconds before it is completed. Towards the completion, a dot here, a curve there, a circle here and a round there-in this manner the piece of

charcoal moves hither and thither for four or five times. Immediately a dancing damsel blooms there. The people who happen to witness the greatness of the creative hands, which quickly depicts a beautiful figure, giving life to mere inanimate sketches and lines in few seconds, do applaud them in wonder and amazement. It is something more than a magic in which mangonut immediately sprouts, spreads leaves and branches and becomes a tree under the magical wand and yields fruit. As the awe – inspiring wonder of the creative art of that artist is to the viewers something greater than the magical mango- tree, the people gathered there are fully absorbed by the greatness of his art and they forget themselves and cry and shout to praise him; “Oh, what a magical wonder! Great and beautiful talent! What a great creator he is!” when one person ventures to throw a coin, many among them begin to put their hands in their pockets. Some of them do follow the first man and give out their mite. Meantime the nimble fingers holding the piece of charcoal is given some rest. People gather in a group, look at them and move from the scene.

I have heard that the art of drawing is a fine art. I am a layman, and do not know any of the nuances of the art of drawing. Even I could very well enjoy and appreciate the skills and abilities of that artist. Unexpected success, unthinkable organisational skill, some sort of a creative ability, the excellence of the thing called imagination – thus, I am amazed and wonder-struck at a variety of things he brought to life. I could not critically analyse and appreciate. I am unable to appreciate and wonder reasonably and rationally like a scientist who does so on seeing the vast expanse of the ocean. But, in the case of a young boy who happens to see the ocean with its turbulent waves and their changing in quick succession, will he not be caught up in awe and bewilderment? Almost like that child, who undergoes such a thrilling experience, I was looking with amazement and surprise at the world of the dynamic art displayed before me. Some of the people who had gathered there were exulting in the creative art, which lay before them in full and complete form, with all admiration and surprise. I did not possess such knowledge, and the ability to admire them, which I have to politely confess. I could only appreciate the art in its formative stage – when it actually takes birth – when the piece of charcoal darts here and there with gusto and draws a picture which takes its full and complete form.

Slowly time slipped by. The crowd also began to dwindle. The artist was seen again seated cool and ‘motionless and still’ on one side. I slowly moved towards the eastern side and stood there. The western sky appeared before me. Only then, I could see and understand that the twilight sky was also drawing several attractive paintings in colour competing with the artist on earth. The purple sky in the horizon was slowly becoming

darker. But, still nature was ceaselessly painting pictures. Yet, there was a vast difference between the performances of these two. The artist on the ground was moving from side to side to draw his pictures. The path way in the bazar gave him room to go on drawing more number of pictures. Therefore, he did not resort to erase them. The vast expanse of the sky is larger and broader than the available space on earth. So, the Artist Nature never ceased to produce more and more pictures. He has the stock of infinite variety of colour combinations to paint with. Every second he was changing the colours of his drawings.

But, the poor artist on the land, who has his canvass in the pathway of the bazaar, has nothing else to draw with, than a small piece of charcoal, not to speak of emulsions of paints and colours. But, as though to compete with the Artist Nature who was painting on the sky, he was also producing varieties of drawings and pictures. When rich ladies are seen adorning their ears with diamond studs radiating light around, will a poor peasant's daughter go around with empty ears? Will she not pluck the blossom of the furz from that "straggling fence that skirts the way" and adorn her ears? Will not that blossom of the fence adorn her ears beautifully?

Then came there a man and a woman, parents of four children, three boys and a child—at-arms, a family with their little belongings, mud pots with burnt bottoms, and torn mats. They landed on the place where I was standing. Their poverty revealed that they were one among the tens of thousands of Tamil families who have no roof over their heads. The poor mother looked at me and said: "Samy! (my lord) will you kindly move a little away from here? We have this place, to eat and sleep, usually at nights". Even before I could move away, the artist vacated the place and moved afar. Then only, for the first time, I saw his bent face straightened upwards, and looking up. The eyes had a gracious and merciful look. I felt that his stubborn heart, which did not yield towards those who rained coins upon him, yielded to and was moved by the tender voice of that poor mother. The merciful look of his eyes fell upon those poor children, the boys and the child-at-arms. Without thinking over it and without any hesitation, he pulled out two coins from his pouch safely placed in his waist and placed them in the hand of eldest of the boys. He never cared to see their value. But I happened to see them; one was a silver coin, I think it must be eight annas; the other was a copper coin and it must be quarter-of-an-anna. When the eldest of the boys got the coins in his hand, the artist moved some distance away from there; and he went and sat at the extreme edge of the Parry's Corner.

Then it came up in my mind, an engagement that evening at Victory Hall. When I started from home early in the morning, I had seen the notice

which informed that Prof. Kamalakannan would address the gathering at 7.30 p.m. at the Victory Hall. I was thinking that I should walk straight to the Victory Hall after I finished my work at Flower Bazaar. If only there was no display of the drawings on the pathway by the artist in the evening, I would have been by this time chit-chatting with my friends at the Victory Hall. The Speaker of the day, Prof. Thiru. Kamalakannan was a great scholar in Psychology. The topic he has chosen for his speech was "Northern Border of Tamil Nadu". I was astonished at the thought that even a Professor of Psychology had opted to talk politics; and therefore, I wanted to go over there to attend the meeting and hear his speech without fail. Eventhough I was not a student of Prof. Kamalakannan, I was introduced to him through his student Kumaresan who was dear to him and also a friend of mine. I had also become well acquainted with him like his own friend than a mere student. This was due to his magnanimity, which has been exalted and adored by myself and my friend Kumaresan. Our mutual love and affection grew up gradually. Therefore, it has become usual for me to attend all his meetings without fail, hear him attentively, and have lively discussions with him expressing my views, on the next day. The topic he had chosen that day was an unusual one; it was related to politics. Hence, my anxiety grew more. When it came up in my mind that my dear friend Kumaresan would also have been present there, my legs took me straight to the Victory Hall. When I set foot among the crowd inside the Hall, I glanced here and there. Neither was my friend there, nor were there anyone who were my acquaintances. Suddenly, I thought of the artist. I felt sorry for having not stayed there, to know more about him. My legs made an about-turn and took me back there. I neared the Parry's Corner. That family of Tamils, which had no roof over its head, was seated occupying that place, and sharing the meal for that night. I sent a close look to the bus stand at the opposite side where there was a line of buses. But the artist was not found there.

I gazed and gazed as far as my eye sight could reach, at the west, hoping that, he having lost his legs, might not have gone anywhere so quickly to vanish from eye sight. But he could not be sighted. I walked a few steps towards the east, and standing at the corner, I sent my look towards the direction of Royapuram. I spotted his figure somewhere exactly between me and the General Post Office on the North Beach Road. It was slowly pacing ahead. He could not and did not walk. So he gently rocked and moved. I thought that he must have his house somewhere in Royapuram. Without hesitation, I followed him.

Though seen from a distance, it appeared as though he was moving slowly, as I approached him nearer and nearer, the great exertion and suffering that he might be put to, for gaining mobility every time he tried to advance,

was fairly obvious. Only then it struck in my mind, that he had to undergo quite a suffering and agony, sans legs, who had earlier provided feast to the eyes of the onlookers, providing them with wonder and amazement, and happiness. I was extremely distressed with this thought. I had seen a number of handicapped persons like him on earlier occasions; and my mind had almost been mortified and insensitive to their suffering thinking that after all that was but nature. But now at long last, my heart had become so sensitised with empathy, and a feeling of mercy gushed into me. Only after I had been clearly following him from a distance and approached him very near and witnessed the rocking motions of that body- and the effort and exertion he took to gain mobility – my brain came to realise the untold sufferings of a person who was so unlucky to loose his legs. As we are accustomed to see such sights, the painful mobility of handicapped persons more often than not, and as we are simply caught up in a machanical way of life, never left with any leisure to think over amidst the racing – and – chasing of the city's hustles and bustles. The feeling of mercy has got burried deep under the bottom-most layer of our mind. I came to know by experience, that even a man who dwells in the city, sometimes is blessed with the "aquifer of mercy" opening and gushing up, if only he would take pains to desilt the sediments which have covered the "aquifer of mercy" in him. It also occurred to me, that I would have missed to realise the pains and sufferings of a lot of people who would have been put to innumerable miseries, and the very thought made me to melt. A thought also flashed in my mind, consoling me. A thought came to my rescue asking "could I blame myself to be the cause for all the sufferings of these sufferers?" By this time I have almost neared the artist who had no legs.

Earlier, the fruit vendor with the fruit basket in the crowd had called him a "lame man". The artist, is not a mere "lame man" as stated by him. He could not stand with one leg (as a lame man would always be). He had in fact lost both his legs; I did see then only that both his legs were severed. As he had removed the cloth from his waist and drapped it around his shoulder and was moving in that posture, the edges of his severed thighs were clearly seen. I saw him in a horrible state having lost his legs upto a part of his thighs. He should have got both his legs amputated. I just thought of those who happen to get their leg amputated due to sore – wound caused by diabetics. The gangrenous leg is amputated. My mind was eager to know whether it happened due to any accident, and how it had occurred. Not knowing a way to pose my questions, I just followed him quietly. The body did posses such nimble hands which was capable to quickly drawing beautiful pictures even on hard and uneven surfaces. I felt sorrowful at the repeated thought that his body, which had the fortune to owe such

outstandingly talented hands, was unlucky, not to have legs to provide it with mobility.

He turned back to look at me, when he was aware of my following him closely. I just moved on walking at slow pace. He remained still without moving further. I just overtook him by walking past him, and stood in front of a building. Realising that I was glancing at him often, he turned again and again to look at me as though he had some doubt over my movement. I did not move from where I was standing. He then moved past me a little way ahead. After he crossed the Post office, he attempted to cut-across the road to reach the other side. Chennai roads are infamous, where people would often subject themselves to great risks howsoever they might be careful and cautious, monitoring both sides while crossing the road. Hence, I was shocked and bewildered at the thought of how this man sans legs would fare while attempting to cross the road. I could not even stand in that place. With my whole body trembling, I just walked slowly. When his eyes were so busily engaged, cautiously looking at both sides of the road, he did not notice me. Luckily there was less traffic, and even the cars and other vehicles including the trams* have ceased to move then for some minutes; and when the road was calm without vehicular movement, he made quick strides and moved away to the other end. During those moments, my mind was trembling with anxiety and fear like that of a man who happened to sight a child running and playing happily, at the side of a well which had no protective walls, unaware of the danger that lurks at close proximity. Only after he had reached the other side of the road, he saw me closely following him. Feigning as though he did not notice me, he moved further and entered the Beach Station. I also followed him stopping a while every now and then. It became sure, that he did not reside at Royapuram; I thought it must be somewhere like Saidapettai.

When I saw him heading towards the Ticket Counters, I stood aside lamenting at the thought: "how would this handicapped man buy a ticket here?" Near the Ticket counter he stretched his hand holding coins-as though to ask for buying him a ticket-towards a man who was richly dressed. But that man did not acknowledge his presence and moved away.

Another man came there to buy ticket. The artist stretched his hand towards him too, and uttered something. That man just shouted: "Get last man! Have you dared come here, to the ticket counter too, begging for alms?" So saying he moved away.

* In Chennai, the then Madras, the Tramway was in operation till early 1950's. Later it was gradually phased out.

I just moved in straight there, and asked the artist, stretching my hand: "I will buy ticket for you. Where do you want to go?" To Chetput" so saying he gave me two annas. "Very kind of you, very good of you, sir" his face was brightened while he extolled these courteous words. I took another two annas from my pocket and tendering those coins at the counter I asked "Two tickets for Chetput". I got two tickets and gave him one.

"Thank you, Sir, I don't know who you are. You have volunteered to help me," he said.

"Is it a help? Let it be so. Please Come. Let's go." So saying I walked ahead.

"At this ticket counter, I have encountered various experiences. Such a number of experiences!" said he, and moved along with me.

An electric train bound for Tambaram was waiting on the platform. When he ventured to board the train, I told him "Be careful, and get in slowly." He replied "I am used to this exercise. This is the only easy mode of conveyance to me. Buses and other vehicles are very difficult to board". He placed one hand and one thigh at the doorway, caught them tight and climbed up and boarded into the train. I also stepped into the train and took my seat on one side. I was about to tell him "take your seat by my side, please". But knowing that I could not ask him to do so, I felt sorry about it.

"You told me about a number of experiences; What were they like?" I asked him.

"You mean, my experiences at the Ticket Counter?" he asked me. Then he began to talk about them. "It is very difficult to assess the youth of the present day. It is impossible to find out which of them are good and which of them bad. Good people who suffer concerns and sufferings of the mundane life are in due course changed to become bad and worst people. For those who are already worse, the life itself is a great game play of cheats. They are prepared to do anything and go to any extreme" he said.

"How can it be?" I asked him.

"At this very same ticket counter, two persons who had watched me regularly, seeing that I used to give money to some body to get tickets, had one day cheated me. One day I gave eight annas to a man for buying me a ticket. He got me a ticket for two annas but he didn't return the change of six annas and disappeared from the scene. Another man on the following week got two annas from me. But he did not care to buy a ticket for me and had vanished from there. On that occasion, it was overcrowded here.

My bad time on that day I had had just five annas. As I felt hungry, I bought "vadai" * (a small food item) for an anna and ate it. I got a parcel of one Vadai for another anna. After parting with two anna's for ticket, only one anna was barely left with me. How can I get a ticket again with that only one anna? I had never been in the habit of begging. But on that day, left with no other option, I approached a lady who had come along with her children, begged for an anna, got it, and gave it back to herself with one more anna, asking her to get a ticket for me".

"Those cheats should have been rogues"

"How do you know they are rogues?"

"May be, because they are poor".

On my uttering these words, he was bewildered and he looked at me. Immediately I felt the blunder that I had committed, and told him "May be because they have no other alternative to make a living".

At this reply he changed his face to shed off the bewilderment and answered "that's quite correct". The train started. He began to talk "On one occasion, two rogues who were so sure that I might be coming with money while I was returning home, untied the knot, and took out the money bag from my waist and took to their heels. I am cursed to be with no legs. What can I do? Therefore, perhaps, my wife might have come to the railway station to receive me. But, there are also good people, many in number, living in this world".

"Of course. All might not be bad guys. I told him.

He replied: "Truly said. If all were bad, would it be possible for you and me to safely move in the street with money on hand? Or, will anyone move out leaving their dear and near ones- wives and children – at home, without any chance to be harmed? I am ever optimistic that there are a lot of good people in the world".

"Really it's true" I said.

He continued: "I still vividly remember his face. He came to the counter to get a ticket. I waved a two anna coin before him and requested him to buy me a ticket. Without taking the coin from my hand he asked me. "To which station?" Hearing from me, he got me the ticket and moved. I followed him saying: "Sir, you have not taken the money for the ticket".

* "Vadais" are popular in south Indian dishes; particularly Tamil's food items. It is a savoury, oil-roasted flour-cake.

"Don't bother. Please keep it with you. Buy some thing and take it home for your children". Thus refusing politely, he went away. Thus, I have seen good Samaritans like him in the same place".

"Whoever he might be, he must be one in a thousand".

"But, people in this country have a strange habit of thinking about their poor brethren that those ill-clad poor men in rags are here to beg. They will try to escape from them. They also fear that their very presence is a menace to them.

"Innumerable large was the presence of beggars here". I answered him.

"Should we not provide them with jobs and compel them to lead a life of dignity?".

When the electric train paused for some minutes at Park Station, there was some sort of overcrowding in the compartment. "Keep aside, give way" saying loudly people got into the train. Actually people jostled upon each other and squeezed in. Some of them saw the artist and cried: "If you people blocked the doorway, how can we enter, and where can we stand?" the artist softly told them: "I am an unlucky chap, without legs to stand, sir. Kindly bear with me, I will alight at Chetput". One among them murmured aloud: "In these days, the trains allow first priority for beggars to travel". Immediately someone else shouted, "First get him down. Don't show mercy". I looked upon the artist. His face didn't reveal any change, and he looked cool and complacent. I addressed them both: "He too has bought his tickets as we have." Without further ado they both settled down quietly.

The electric train was running fast slightly swaying this side and that, to the rhythmic sound from the rails. I plunged into thinking as to how the world was used to belittle and humiliate the poor, laughing at those clad in poor attire; while at the same time, how, the very same world is showing regard and respect to those who were gorgeously dressed and who displayed their opulous wealth. To be Dressed well is also necessary I thought; but I was pained to realise that the poor and under privileged, suffering in abject poverty, who struggle for existence without even having a meal-for-a-day cannot spend money for "dressing well".

At that time, a co-passenger told me to my face: "These people-sans legs- shall never resort to come out for a train journey".

I answered him "After all, he has to meet the need of his belly! If only he remained within four walls, at his home, will this so called civilised

society save him and protect him? Or else, will the Government come forward to take care of him? Whether one is with or without legs, he can earn his loaf of bread for the day, only when he exerts and sweats for that”.

“What can these people do, to earn for a livelihood, by going out of the four walls?” he posed this question in return to my words.

By this time, Chetput Station had neared. So, I stood up to move and answered him: “That’s a different problem. Who exactly will think of those things?” So saying I moved towards the doorway.

Meantime, the artist had slowly moved towards the doorway. As soon as the train halted, some people alighted. The artist also managed somehow to squeeze through them and got down. I stepped down following him.

“Sir, are you also from Chetput? Where shall you go from here?” The artist asked me.

“Yes. To Amaindhakarai” answering him, I walked along with him. The pedestrian overbridge meant for the safe passage of passengers to cross the railway lines stood before us. I felt a lot at the thought that this would be really an **uphill task** giving considerable pain to this man without legs to scale all those steps upto its height and to scale down again to cross the lines. I pointed out to him about this.

“It was so miserable an ordeal to me in the beginning. Now, I am well accustomed to it”. Saying so, he jumped each step in that sitting posture just like a child and reached the top.

As he reached the footway after ascending from the upper most step, he just sat there “Motionless and Still” for some minutes. Due to the agonising exercise of scaling those steep steps without legs he breathed heavily. Therefore, he took rest for a while and then moved ahead. When he scaled down the steps at the other end for exit, he folded both his hands and said, “Well, Sir! Shall I take leave of you?” I told him “Let me also accompany you for some distance”. “My wife and the boy have come and are waiting for me. I will go along with them. You can stay back” he said and pointed out to me the direction in which they were standing. I saw them, standing there eagerly awaiting his arrival. Even though they are poor and underprivileged, the love and affection that had adorned their eyes were so distinct and laudable.

“Ponni! What’s this? Why should you come all the way? That too, leaving the child alone?” asked the artist.

"I was running short of betals. Hence, I came here to purchase it also. The boy is sleeping". She told him.

At once, the artist unfolded the knot at his waistcloth and handed over all the coins to his wife. She, without even counting them, got them from his hand and safely placed them in her cloth in the waist and sent around a glance.

He told her, "You get betals here" pointing out a petty shop nearby.

"They give less in quantity. You please move along. I will get betal afterwards". So saying Ponni began to proceed from there.

The artist turned towards me and with folded hands he once again tried to take leave of me. But curiosity arose in me to probe his life further. I told him: "I will also come with you. Is not your house some where on the way? I will come up to that, and return to Amaindhakarai from there".

Ponni, did not walk; instead, stood there and looked with apprehension. She asked: "Why this sir should come to our house?"

The artist also seconded her and said, "Sir, why should you come to our house? You may kindly take your way from here".

"Just like that, I'll come, you please move ahead". Telling them, I began to walk slowly.

Having no other go, the artist also slowly moved. Some sort of suspicion arose in the mind of Ponni, coupled with concern about me. Even as she was walking, she turned back, looked at me and asked: "Are you, sir, from the Police?"

"No, not at all. You need not have to fear. I am coming just like that, to see you," I said.

"Why should we fear if he is from Police? Those who commit any crime shall have to fear. What is there for us to worry?" the artist said.

"How did you come to know him?" Ponni asked her husband.

"Was I not drawing sketches and figures there on the ground at road side? He should have seen me there. He has his house at Amaindhakarai, he said. It was he who got the ticket for me to-day. We were talking to each other during our train journey" said the artist.

"Someone with a good nature! How much kindness and affection he shows towards poor people!" so saying Ponni looked back at me with gratitude.

If we are disposed to show affection and kindness towards poor people, it will become a lifetime-job visiting every hut to meet them all and show affection; my kindness towards them is caused by the expression of the artistic talent and the resultant attraction seen in the innovative art. This fact, she is unaware of, I thought within myself. With this thought I looked up at the sky. Just in the direction opposite to us I saw the half moon, sending its rays around. The constellation of stars called "Karthigai" numbering six were also sighted in the sky by the side of the moon. A big white cloud was very much following the path of the moon, as though it would catch it. A couple – a husband and wife – were walking towards us from the opposite direction, leading a bull dog in-chain. The husband was having his hand on the shoulder of his wife. Ponni sent a deep look on them and walked ahead. What sort of thinking would have arisen in her mind, I don't know. But I had a thought in my mind. I thought that the love and affection that was poured by the artist who had no legs, on Ponni, would be in no way smaller than the love and affection in the heart of the husband who had walked by with his hand on the shoulders of his wife, openly on the road. "The amount of sacrifice by Ponni for the artist must be much greater than the sacrifice of the wife-who was proud of bringing up a bulldog" I thought. As soon as they crossed us, I heard the man telling his wife in English: "Honey, there is a wife and a son to a lame man who has no legs! Did you see that?" His wife too responded to him in English: "What a cursed life! It shall certainly be a hell! I hate it!" On hearing these words the artist turned back, looked at them, and donned a smile on his countenance.

I had some doubt as to whether their talk in English was understood by him; if so, whether he knew English. I myself put a full stop to this confusion, that he might not know English, if only he knew, he had no necessity to draw sketches and lines with a piece of charcoal in the China Bazaar for getting quarter anna and half anna.

They now left the regular way and took to a small path branching from there.

There were hutments nearby. I thought that one of them should be their house. I asked him "Do you own your hut?"

He said, "To get the meal for the day is the highest priority every day for us. Where can we go to own a hut?"

Ponni said: "Neither the ground, nor the hut belongs to us. We have got them for rent".

"Two rupees per month is the rent" said the artist.

A dog came towards us barking aloud. "As you are a stranger it barks", he told me, and ordered it to keep quiet. The dog then wailing its tail welcomed us in obedient tone. There were some ten to fifteen members crowded in front of a hut. Inside the hut, two people were trading abusive words upon each other. Both were heard as males' voice. Inside another hut we heard the sound of beating (Dop, Dop) and the weeping of a female. In a corner of that place, on an open ground where the moon was shining brightly, seven or eight boys were playing "Sadugudu".* When we were headings towards that corner, inside another hut we happened to hear the crying and wailing of a mother. Ponni told me, that a sick child in that hut had died that morning. The artist told me: "That woman was so good a soul. It was she who gave me a roof above my head and protection and a lot of help to me in the beginning". Then he asked his wife: "Ponni, Do you know whether they have any rice or not? Did they have their meal? You just enquire her. You can as well cook food at our house and take it to them. Their house is more or less your mother's abode".

Ponni and the boy entered a small thatched hut, the roof of which was tattered.

The artist looked at me and said: "Welcome sir, to our humble abode; do bend a little and enter".

"Don't bother! I'll be here" I told him.

The artist told his wife: "Ponni, go and find out some fruits; or atleast bring a cup of milk or atleast a tumbler of butter milk ..."

"I will go out to fetch either some fruits or milk" so saying Ponni ventured to go out once again.

"Amma (Madam), Listen me. Nothing is needed. You give them to your children. Within another few minutes I will straight go home and have a full and contented meal. Why should you bother to fetch them for me?" I told her, and stopped her.

"Sir, kindly be seated" the artist said.

* A game akin to "Kabadi" popular throughout Tamil Nadu.

I had no mind to be seated there. Poverty had deprived them of the beauty of life and had destroyed cleanliness. But, It was impossible for poverty to erase the love bubbling in the heart. Take for instance a desertland. The unbearable heat of the land might burn out the trees, plants and creepers there. But, it could not wipe away the real family life, - full of affection and love - of the vultures which have had the desert land as their habitat. Just like that, I felt, that even though the abnormal scorching of the poverty have degenerated and destroyed the beauty and cleanliness of life, it did not succeed in curbing or putting out real love and affection that sprang from the heart of hearts. I hailed and adored their mutual affection. Due to my inquisitiveness to know about the living environment of the hand blessed with such great artistic talent, I had the patience and anxiety to follow the very hands where the art was born, upto the hutments. But, however, my mind did not compromise itself to allow me to enter into and sit inside the hut. Without revealing my embarrassment and displeasure I told him: "It's all right. I shall come again another day. I just came here to know the place where you are put up, and how you do feel here, and there was nothing special at all".

"Somehow we do exist here in the manner you have seen. I am not dejected, not displeased with this life. I will be content, if this life is blessed to be without sorrows and remains stable" said the artist.

"It is the artistic talent of your nimble hand that has brought me thus far to this place," I told him.

"Pch! All these talents are but exposed only to earn the daily bread" He said.

"May I come another day to speak at length leisurely with you?" So saying I took leave of him and moved to go.

Meantime, Ponni was watching me without uttering a word. I walked from there with a thinking that when and how the suspicion about me in her mind will fade off. "Ponni, is the child still at sleep?", came these words from the artist, and in reply "Yes" was the answer heard from Ponni. I walked fast towards home at Amaidhakarai.

I felt the moonlight gradually receding and I looked up at the sky. A very large cumulous cloud had swallowed the moon and was found to be arrogantly proud of that. Poor moon, even in that state of adversity, was seen to run freely inside its stomach, least worried of its incarceration. Even during its captivity from within its confines, it sent its cool light as far as possible. Sometime afterwards, the influence

of the cloud over the moon will come to an end; and instantly, the moon will shine beautiful and bright in its full capacity to the world. But, as soon as it comes out of that cloud, what other cloud- cumulous or nimbis - might move in there to swallow it? Will there be no unbridled, and unimpounded happy life for that artistic moon which radiates fine, and diffused light? Thinking in this way, I walked towards home.

As soon as I stepped into my house, the harsh and loud voice of my wife received me thus: "Did I not tell you in the morning, when you left home, to reach back early? You have come but around nine?"

She continued with a list of complaints as her voice stretched further: "You don't care for your family. I have to go to the bazaar to buy the stores. Again I have to attend all the household chore. "Do these children read? Do they go to School?" Did you ever bother to attend to any of these? Return from office, have the supper and go to sleep. Wake up in the morning. Take a cup of coffee in one hand, and the newspaper in the other. Read and throw away the daily. Take bath and take tiffin. Then straight go to the office. Is it not your routine, repeated every day? Have you been taught so by your parents?"

I cannot find a cogent answer to this series of questions posed by her. I thought it is but a monotonous routine, and her questions also remain the same for ever. I took off my shirt and walked to the water tub to have a face – wash.

"If you kept quiet like this, you must be thinking that the daily chore of the family will be attended to somehow or by some other woman and the family affairs will be run on somehow. This is what I have been destined to suffer. Destiny has brought me here". These were the auspicious words "hailing me to my prosperity". I began to attend my duties peacefully, thinking that these were really a fitting welcome to me. The miserable life of the artist and the soothing affection and love of his wife towards him came up in my mind. I was repeatedly anguished over the fate of the art and culture, which were destined to be humiliated like this in a hut that was in tatters.

THE next-day while I was in the bed still, I heard a voice and woke up. The voice resembled that of Ponni. I realised only later that it was not that of Ponni, but of a woman vendor selling drumsticks in a basket, when she repeated its price while selling. Instantly, I thought of Ponni. A red sari which had almost faded; with a "Pallav" which has gaudy prints; the blue choli which has turned to the colour of a soiled and dirty linen; the hair unkempt, and not treated with oil; a 'Kum Kum' on her fore-head which is unattractive; but, with all these, a pretty shapely form; youthfulness still alive in the face; an innocent look without any trace of cunning; teeth almost brownish red due to betel-chewing; a walk which is unaware of fashionable gait etc.; all these descriptions came up in my mind to depict the typical appearance of Ponni. I wondered how this simple woman sans civilised appearance could have occupied in the heart of a man who would otherwise have become the monarch of the world of art. There must be a speciality, in the love that flows from her heart, with selfless purity and with ability to bear with adversity, I thought.

My wife was trying to lit fire in the oven, and the sound of the blow of pipe was heard from the kitchen.* The baby-at-arms woke up and began to cry "ma, ma". Upon hearing the crying of the little child, my wife came towards the room, and I could hear her footsteps. Immediately, I rolled to my side in the bed and lay there with my eyes closed. She came in noiselessly in a measured pace, taking care not to wake me up from sleep; she talked to the baby, (*don't weep, my dear little one*) and took it out of the room. Immediately, the girl-a little grown up than the child, rose up, and sat couching on my side. She tried to wake me up calling "pa, Appa". I did not respond and I lay remaining in the bed with my eyes closed. She also got up and went out of the room. I just pretended to be asleep with the intention that this small girl and little baby-at-arms should not be a hindrance to my sleeping. I was ashamed of my selfishness. I tried to escape from worry of even a small disturbance. I then thought of my wife's position who is undergoing agony, distress and worry from all our four children everyday. I thought of her perseverance, patience and distress. She happened to toil everyday in the dull and monotonous routine; she has to cook food, the dullest and

* In those days, before the advent of kerosene stove and gas stove, all women folk used to cook with fire lit on fuel wood kept in the oven. And, they used a pipe to blow air to make the fire was caught easily in the firewood.

monotonous job, without complaining of boredom. She brings up, upkeeps and maintains well and protects all our four children; she does attend without fail to all the daily chore at home without any omission; she does wait with patience for my arrival; on the days when I arrive late, she keeps vigil and remains awake; she courteously serves me my food; she does bear all the burden of the yoke of family responsibilities.

After all, she could remain a little more patient and receive me when I come home late. That wasn't possible for her. Poor lady! What can she do about that? Will not the burden of the household duties and the nuisance that comes out of it make her bored? Ponni comes to the railway station and waits for her husband. But, altogether hers is a different context. She doesn't have so much of pressure and burden, and nuisance in life. Abject poverty had delimited all her duties and responsibilities. Ponni does not have the bother about maintaining and guarding things just as my wife has. Ponni does not have things worth their name in her hut. It is a small hut and hence, she need not exert to wash the floor. She does not have the necessity nor the burden of bathing her children, dressing them up neat and tidy. She need not waste her time, hours together, in cooking and preparing different kinds of delicious food items. She need not express her concern over almirahs, boxes, lock and key, doors and safety locks etc. She need not entertain a flow of guests and relatives etc. There are a number of other things which are absent in the life of Ponni. The poor woman Ponni's life is very much limited to her few belongings like a tattered mat, some sort of food, a few mud pots, two or three clothings. She can never resort to buy things and keep them safe; whenever she finds some money on her hand, she will go and buy her barest necessities. Should I thought that I never compare her plight with my wife's and weigh the affections that flow from them to find out whose affection was the best and well disposed one towards her husband. When I thought of my wife, I could find that my wife had really taken more burden of the family for herself single handedly, and she had almost left me free, shouldering responsibilities and sufferings. At that moment a feeling of gratitude gushed in my heart which was at once filled up with love and affection towards her.

"Nagu! Nagu!" I called her in. She, even though was in the adjacent room, yelled back: "Why? Why do you call me? Should I come there, to pick you too by the hand and lead out? Coming there".

I didn't answer. She came in.

"Why did you call me?" She asked.

"Please allow me to do as I please for six days in a week. On the remaining one day, ie, on Sunday only, I will do as you please. On that day only, I will cook; I will brush the teeth for our children; I will attend to their bathing; dress them; apply oil and comb the hair; I will feed them; I will sing a lullaby as they go to sleep; I will take them to the physicians' consulting room and get them their medicine; I will go to the market; I will fold the cloths which are washed and dried; I will also write down accounts for the expenditure" I was going on telling like this.

"O.K., enough of it. Get up from the bed. Don't boast of your husbandry in empty words. It can't be run that way. You will run out of funds meant for a week in one day. For the rest of the days, you will allow the cat to rest on the hearth as we might not have anything for our cooking," so saying she headed towards the kitchen.

The bare truth in her statement struck me. It also came up to my mind as told by my father once. He told me that our womenfolk who were brought up in our age-old traditions used to be thrifty and austere in their domestic life, which itself carried a lot of sacrifices in it. I thought of these women who were very much attentive and devoted in protecting the interests of their husbands and children. They forego their needs and they even neglect their health. I was proud of my wife with the thought that she was also one of those sacrificers. I rose up from the bed, raised and stretched my arms to put off the sleepiness and went to attend to the morning routine.

When I came back and sat in the hall, I happened to look at several pictures which were hung over the doorways and above the windows as well as in the places on the walls between doors and windows. There were pictures full of natural scenarios and also pictures of children-Japanese children. All those pictures were printed ones. Between them there were also pictures hung on walls which were drawn on one side of gramophone records. I have seen them many times on earlier occasions. But to-day I was eager to have a look at them leisurely. I did keep looking at them. It was not possible for me to derive as much pleasure as I had, when I was appreciating the scenes near the Parry's Corner, the display of the artistic talent. I looked at these pictures on the walls with a sort of disapproval and dislike.

My wife, at that moment entered the scene. She looked quizzically at me, and as though she had understood what was running through my mind, she asked me: "Why there lurks a disapproving look? You dislike these pictures also, which were hung by me? You think, they might as well be removed?"

"No Nagu, Just like that, I just was having a look at them," I told her.

"Have you not looked at them just like that all these days? Are you looking at them for the first time only to-day?" She questioned me.

"It occurred to me today for some reason to have a look at them," I answered.

"If you don't like them, please remove them. Whatever I do, you don't like, I know. Why, I myself am a person not liked by you. Am I not?" She retorted.

I was puzzled not knowing what to do to stop her and reassure her. I called her, "Nagu, dear, please come here and sit by my side. I will tell you about what had appeared in my mind". She came near and sat by my side on a chair. "Please say it quickly. I have a lot of work to do and I shall go! I have to get the clothes soaked in soap water" she said.

"Are the celluloid toys and plastic toys not beautiful?" I asked her.

"Yes" She nodded.

"Yet they were cast by machines which had no feeling or sense of art". I told her.

"Right!".

I continued: "Eventhough they are beautiful, they do not express any aesthetic sense. Just assume now, that I resort to cast a toy-baby with my own hand, using clay. Will it not be an expression of my aesthetic sense while being beautiful?"

She said, "Even if it might not be beautiful, the toy-baby made by your own hand must be quite gratifying".

I told her, "Suppose I do make the toy baby beautifully. Suppose, you happened to witness me in person while I was in the process of making that toy. What was mere clay in my hand was slowly taking the shape of a child within minutes, you were looking at me all the while; and then, would not your witnessing in person the process of the art form taking shape, thrill you and make you happy?"

"Yes, of course" she answered.

"After having witnessed the process of the art-form taking shape and the inherent skill exhibited in that process, would that old celluloid toy fascinate you?"

“What next?”

“It was in this manner that my attitude had changed. All these pictures were printed ones. What I witnessed yesterday was an attractive scene in which an artist was drawing pictures, which were expressive of a great aesthetic sense. That too on the China Bazaar road, on an uneven surface, with a piece of charcoal,” I explained.

“That is why, you disapprove these pictures?” She asked me.

“I don’t say so. When I have witnessed a very great and real artistic talent just displayed in front of my eyes, I am no longer in a mind to appreciate these pictures”.

“Why should we go in for that? Usually people in big houses do have pictures like these hung on the walls above the doors and windows. I too wanted to follow them and had them hung so in our house. The hall is the place where people used to come and meet us on occasions. I did it with the intention to make this place appear elegant and attractive, and earn their appreciation, and add to its value. If you resort to look at them with a sense of art and this and that” .

While she was talking to me so, the obstinate child did something and the boy beat the child making it cry aloud; the girl called her mother from the garden at the back yard, and immediately she (my wife) left me. There, in the place where I was, I sat still with a sigh.

‘Hall is the place where people come and meet us’, ‘it shall appear elegant’, ‘earn appreciation’, “add to its value”, “usual in big house” these words and expressions were resounding in my ears even after she had left me. I thought that with respect to the sense of art, my wife was blindly following what was common practice in the world. Not only the art, even the sense of beauty she was in search of was patterned so. Her culinary work also conformed to the general pattern. Her piety, devotion, faith and worship, including her observance of rituals all conformed to the general pattern. All these were being blindly followed by her in the way the world did it. The mind which was not set to discern beauty in neat and simple dress, but which was looking for it in costly and gorgeous dress; a habit which has been cultivated to cook food in brassware and aluminum ware serving only to the taste-buds in the tongue while the nutritious items were allowed to go waste; a habit which was quite contrary to cooking food in mud-pot and earthenware which would be good and healthy for the body; a devotion to faith in and worship of god, which was not seen in the sympathy and mercy that flow from within when wages and other kind of presents are given to the poor and the needy, which was being attempted to be seen in chanting

of mantras, sorcery and magic and the offering of very many dishes by the house-at-the corner; I could realise that almost in all these things there was a common, inherent pattern.

Blindly following the customs and manners prevalent in the world for the sake of getting the respect and esteem – if this policy was adopted outside the home, it would indeed be a good habit which would abide by the decrees of the society and the social life. But, should these blind habits dominate the life within four-walls? Thus, I began to ponder a lot, at the end of which some sort of dislike rose-up against my wife. Fortunately, the Thirukkural Couplet which runs as:

“குணம் நாடிக் குற்றமும் நாடி அவற்றுள்
மிகை நாடி மிக்க கொளல்”*

rose up in my mind. Along with that, the meaning explained for the couplet by our Tamil Teacher also came up in my mind.

He had said, “This kural couplet is applicable not only to a political context. This will be appropriate and applicable equally well in the context of conjugal life. When entering into married life, when you happen to find out a mistake in your future wife, you should also find out the virtues in her. Then weighing them both, you choose to accept her, when she is weighted more with good aspects”. This has come up in my mind at a very appropriate time, now, and saved me. Thrift and austerity, with an eye on my limited income; extending moral support to me, when we come across difficulties and distresses, even though she melted down and wept; firm in chastity; thoroughness in worldly procedures; deeply rooted in good habits and customs and not giving them up at any cost; good structure, attractive and beautiful; ever wishing and seeking for the betterment and advancement of the husband. All these virtues possessed by my dear wife came to my mind. When good things, are vanishing into thin air in the life of those who work very hard and learn them and acquire them in this world, I was very much relieved with a sense of happiness to find out virtues like chastity, sense of duty and integrity, sense of and commitment to sacrifice, gratitude and affection and kindness still exist in those very womenfolk who blindly follow the old and past traditions. The lapse that I sighted or felt to exist in my wife in the absence of aesthetic sense was not a lapse to be attributed as exclusive to her! It exists in most of the contemporary women! I felt that most of the womenfolk in the world are akin to her in leading a mechanical life and adoring the art in their own way. At this thought, a sense of dislike that had lurked in my mind earlier about my wife, immediately disappeared.

* Let (a King) consider (a man's) good qualities; let him also consider his faults, and then let him consider which of these are greatest, and let him judge (of his character) by that which prevails. (Translation by Drew & Lazarus)

3

ON the evening of that day, as soon as I came out of the office, I went straight to the Parry's Corner. I went there to meet the artist and see his charcoal drawings. But I was disappointed, as I could not see him there as I expected. Whereas I spent hours together there the previous day, to-day I was pained to stand there even for a while. Then, I thought about Victory Hall and I began to walk towards there. Before I entered the Hall, I heard somebody's voice calling me by my name and I turned back to see the person. When I came to know that it was my friend Mr. Kumaresan who called me out, I turned towards him.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?" my friend asked me.

"I had an unexpected engagement". I told him.

"Have you ever had an engagement foreseen by you? Alright, be seated". Saying so, he gave some space for me to sit down with him. "It was a wonderful speech, delivered by our respected professor yesterday. As you were absent, you only were the loser",

he said.

"I know pretty well. What can I do? There was no other hope, and I can't help it".

"Have you been kept engaged in the office? Love with anyone outside?"

"What man? How can you talk like that knowing full well about me?"

"Perhaps you have been to a new film?"

"When I had the promise of the lecture of the professor, would I ever go to any cinema?"

"Now-a-days, only when there are no good pictures screened, people like that. Only some people like you and I are attending to meetings."

"There are some people like that".

"Say it 'there are many people like that'. Only some people like you and I are coming to meetings to hear good and scholarly speeches".

I pat upon the shoulders of my friend and told him "Yes. Come to the point. Tell me what his talk was about."

"Will it be so easy to recast them?"

"What did he say about the northern border of Tamil Nadu?" I asked him.

"Professor said that it all depended on an unbiased research that might be conducted in Chittoor District.

"He further proceeded to make a base first, saying that, when we resort to bifurcate and rearrange the villages and towns at the border to delineate the states' border lines, there were five ways available to conduct such researches, and then elaborated on that".

I asked him: "What were they?"

"Number One: We should do research on the history of that area; two: the buildings etc situated there; three: ways to eliminate the harms that were done behind the screen there; four: to take the number of the populace languagewise; five: taking the statistics of the people of that area based on their willingness as to which of the state they want to be merged with. Among the five ways for undertaking such a research, he stated that, reminiscing the past history will not at all help for amity in politics. As regards the antiquity of the buildings etc there, that could not form the basis for deciding whether it belonged to a certain territory, leave alone asking for compensation for the same. When he narrated about the harms that were systematically perpetrated in the area, for over a period of thirty years in Chittoor District, it was profusely soul-stirring. There, they first closed the Tamil schools, village after village. They replaced the Tamil Teachers in every village with Telugu Teachers. Pupils who studied Tamil were compelled to learn Telugu. A false propaganda was carried out saying that, if the Tamil pupil learn Telugu, Tamil would be learnt automatically. Tamil officials were shifted and Telugu-speaking officials were sent there in their places. When as many as one third of the members in Tirupathi Municipality were Tamil speaking members, Tamil was eliminated even from the elementary schools in that town. When others were engaged in their efforts and strategies to summarily eliminate all the Tamil Elementary School without exception, the Tamils there were split into four or five groups according to their party affiliations; they were divided and scattered as small pulses spilt out of a sack; and they just spent their time idly, engaged in useless talks. Above all, he highlighted an important issue".

“What was that?” I asked him.

“Just as it was a criminal offence to deprive other’s rights, it was equally a criminal offence to keep quiet doing nothing against it, and to be a mute spectator when others cause the deprivation of our rights” was the view expressed by him. He also pointed out that the Andhras were the people who committed the criminal offence stated earlier and the Tamil’s committed the later said criminal offence, and they did continue to commit the same offence still. He said that Tamils were deteriorating because they had mistaken their helplessness, cowardice and gullibility for forbearance, tolerance and magnanimity.

“Great! Driven home well! Has not our professor of eminence turned into an astute politician who could make such a great political oration?”

“Yes, of course. He also touched on that subject. He elaborated in his speech this particular issue very clearly thus: *“There is a misconception in our country that people in parties alone can talk on politics. But the real fact goes to assert that any one who is hungry and in search of food, has a duty ordained on him to acquire knowledge of politics, and has right vested upon him to talk politics; people with party affiliations have basically a drawback inherent with them; they will not talk boldly, about the lapses in their party - if it has lapses - and will never expose them; ironically, if they find something good and benevolent in the functioning of the opposition parties, they hardly appreciate them openly; hence, it is clear, that those who have not subjected themselves as obedient slaves to party-politics, and who are independent, retaining their freedom of thought and expression shall come forward to talk on politics well”*.

“What next? What happened to the topic of the day – The Northern Border of Tamil Nadu?” I asked him.

He went on to recapitulate the utterances of our professor thus: “In Chittoor District, the Telugu people who had from time immemorial kept relationship with Tamil Nadu in Chengalpattu, South Arcot and North Arcot districts, are living in large number. If they were given a free hand to express their views without restricting, compelling or confusing them on their option of merger with any one of these two states, (Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh) they would definitely and willingly opt for Tamil Nadu. Such Telugus are in very large number in Chittoor District. You shall not call them ‘Andhras’; instead, they shall be called as ‘Tamilians who speak Telugu’. Are there not ‘Tamilians who speak Urdhu’ and ‘Tamilians who speak Marathi’? Just so these people should be treated as ‘Tamilians who speak Telugu’.

"Next to their population comes the population of 'Tamil speaking Tamils'; then only comes the population of 'Telugu speaking Andhrass'. The truth that the last of these three categories are minority will come to limelight only when neutrality is established in politics. Otherwise, if Tamils would shed off their animosities based on party politics, give up their fanciful talks, and assume a high sense of duty, they could make others realise the truth". Thus, the professor concluded his speech.

"Very good points. A wonderful and novel speech which was not expected from our professor". Thus I admired his speech.

"Novelty did not stop there" he said.

"Was there anything more?" I eagerly asked him.

"He came to the meeting, yesterday, along with his wife," he told.

It was a surprise for me. "Was that so? Did the madam also come there? So far, he had not brought the madam along with him, be it public functions, or meetings held under the auspices of the college. Certainly it was novel", I said.

"Professor was talking so much on Tamil Nadu" I stopped hesitatingly.

"Come on, speak. Why did you stop? I know pretty well, what you are going to say?".

"Why should I tell you? You know it better". I cut him short.

He proceeded to say, "You wanted to ask me, why he had not married a Tamil Woman. Was it so?"

"Yes" blinking, I made the admission as though I had done some mistake.

He spoke on, elaborately. "As we talk on Tamil and Tamil Nadu, we don't mean that we should not have any relationship with other states. This point was also mentioned by the professor in his speech. Hereafter, no particular nation or country can sustain, keeping itself aloof. Even the whole world might come together under one Government. *Hereafter, divisions and barriers in the name of History and Geography, Religion, caste and creed and customs and traditions perpetrated through the system of state will be blown off; but, the division or sub-class based on language alone can survive.* A barrier of division in the name of language will not sound uncivil nor uncultured; but, that alone can be a base for all. Division in the

name of language is essential, because, people can come together in the name of language and elect their government. Fanaticism in the name of religion might lead to unrest, resulting in rioting, arson, looting and homicide; whereas fanaticism in the name of language will never lead to such chaos. Our professor had been in U.S.A. for two years. Hence, he had talked with the background of his wide knowledge and experience."

"Will not the division in the name of linguistic group, ever fade away?" I posed a question to my friend.

He answered me in the words of the professor. "The whole universe shall become one nation with one government. Then, English shall be accepted as the sole official language; all the citizens in the world shall become educated; there shall be two-language formula to rule the nation and the state; one language among these two will be the mother tongue and the other will be English Language. When all these things happen without fail, the whole world will come under one language in the next generation. Till such time it might not be possible", the professor observed. Perhaps, we may not even be able to dream of it."

"When people in high eminence like him, offer themselves to marry women from other states, how can the Tamil women look for life a partner and establish their life?"

"Are not the womenfolk of other states searching for and winning the hands of others (men) with the help of their beauty and talents? The Tamil Women shall also progressively advance to such extent as to attract the menfolk with their beauty. That is the only way to come up. If they shrink within the four walls of their house and are talented merely in cooking, it won't help them to progress".

"Is not the art of cooking, quite essential for the family?"

"Of course, it is necessary. But with the help of cooking alone, it would not be possible to attract the minds of our men folk. With the advent of Hotels, restaurants and boarding houses the value given for the cooking talent has been eroded".

"O.K. let it be gone. Let us switch our topic to some other thing."

"Why shall we analyse this subject so elaborately? Let us ask the view of our professor. He will be the least perturbed to talk on this; rather, he will happily explain on this in detail. You are well aware of his magnanimity, his good manners in mingling himself during discussions of points. Can we

go and ask him?" So saying he immediately rose up as though he would start to go there, right then.

I put my hands on his shoulders gently, and pushed him to resume his seat and said, "No urgency; we will go and meet him leisurely. Should we ask straight in his face, about his personal life? No, no".

"What nonsense you talk? We should ask only him about his own life. Will it be of any use if you ask somebody who is wandering on the street unconnected with him?" he shot back.

I told him : "You have been very close to him, whereas I was not that much".

"I told you last year itself. I asked you to get closer to him. To meet him and to discuss with him, will be more useful than learning through reading in a big library. Don't you know that? He, after having returned from the States (U.S.A) had thoroughly changed, and he has become young in his mind".

"I had been to him even without your company. But, I would keep quiet, listening to him, not knowing what to ask and when to ask. He himself would ask so many questions about me and the world and then he alone would be talking to me".

"Couldn't you understand? Didn't I tell you?"

"He is elder to us by ten to fifteen years. However, he would mingle freely with youngsters as a peer would do". I said.

My friend said : "Al right. Why should we remain here sitting and talking. If we could go over there, meet him and discuss with him, it would be of great use. Please get up, we would go," and rose up.

I too got up and told him, "We need not go to his residence to-day. We will now go to the Marina Beach and while away the time, walking there". We both came out of the Hall.

"To walk about aimlessly and without any purpose, and forgetting the time- consciousness, in the Marina Beach will certainly provide us with happiness and joy, it's true" saying thus my friend walked with me. He wished someone "Good Evening, Sir" who happened to cross us, and altogether dropped the topic we were discussing so far. The gentleman whom he wished "good evening" did not open his mouth but reciprocated with a wave of his arm and proceeded in his own direction. As soon as we reached the pavement on China Bazaar I stopped and my friend asked me:

"What Thiru? Would you like to go by bus? Did I not tell you? We will walk the distance. We'll enter the court compound and exit through the other side; then we'll walk towards Marina. Let' us go".

We entered the High Court Compound, and came out of it on the other side; We passed the Railway crossing near the Reserve Bank*, and then we began to walk towards the south. We saw a beautiful woman with a child-at-arms leading a blind man by hand who came in front of us, begging. The man had lost both the eyes. When she neared us my friend asked her "What is he to you?"

I thought that they must be father and daughter. But I was shocked to hear it when she said: "He is my husband".

My friend did not stop there, and he went to ask further "say, to whom did you bear the child? Speak the truth".

Immediately the blind man was pained and displeased. "What samy (my lord)? Why are you hurting the beggars like this?"

I pulled my friend away from them, telling him "why do you tease these poor people with such harsh words?" After a little distance I told him that what he uttered were unkindly wrong.

"You don't know anything. They have no relationship between them. They just pretend to be husband-and-wife for the day to eke-out a livelihood. I have a lot of experience about these people. You are among the men who believe "all that glitters is gold". Said my friend.

I was utterly displeased with his behavior.

I told him "why should we probe. at all"?

"If we don't who else will? During the visits and arrivals of V.I.Ps like great political leaders, Heads of States and foreign dignitaries our officials used to conduct a rehearsal well ahead of their arrivals, and they would be taken in a procession according to strict protocol, through and along only a few well regulated places. Those V.I.Ps and foreign dignitaries would also take it for granted that what they had seen was Tamil Nadu and they would express their appreciation in comparison with rich and well developed countries. The begger families in large numbers who cook their poor meal at the roadsides; pregnant women who have no roof to rest under; deliveries

* When this novel was written the famous sub-way near Reserve Bank & Port Trust was yet to come up. There was only a Railway Level Crossing between Fort and Beach stations on the railway.

of babies that do occur at the street corners; the areas where good people with no work or income rot in hunger and die; the wretched rogues who wander everywhere bereft of any job hunting the streets to fill up their bellies by indulging in all sorts of vandalism, and innumerable scenes are there such as these!. If we fail to probe these, who else will do that?" So saying he walked further straight to a place where two women were crying aloud and he took me there, telling me "look at here" and pointed out to them.

I looked at the scene. A handsome child, about ten months old, was laid there dead. The two women were sitting on both sides. I saw them lamenting over its death. My friend without showing sympathy or mercy asked them; "whose child is this?"

One woman spoke, pointing out the other, "It is her child, samy! Due to poverty and having nothing to feed, the child died".

My friend asked the lady who spoke: "what was she to you?"

"My cousin sister – wife of my brother – in – law" She said.

"Don't tell me a lie. Speak truth. What about the father of the child? Is he there?"

"Some six months have gone since he was dead, samy".

"Tell me accurately".

She was bewildered at his words. With a puzzled look she said: "Samy, it was true". So saying she came to prostrate at his feet.

He asked her: "you said that she was the mother of the dead child. Is it not a lie?"

"No samy, I swear by god".

"If only it was hers', and she was the mother who had born that child, would she leave the child in the hot sun? Would she like to leave it at the roadside and weep for that? Tell me the truth, otherwise.. ."

"Samy, it is you who will keep away from the hot sun. How can we, the have-nots bother about it?"

I could no longer tolerate this kind of conversation indulged in by my friend. I just pulled him towards me. But he would not budge an inch. I left him there without a word, walked a little distance and stood right under a tree. He was seen talking to her further, and moved away from there without

giving her any paise. When he came near me I broke out: "Merciless man you are".

"You mean me?"-

"Yes, you of course".

"I am certainly not" he burst out. He spoke with a bit of anger that bubbled with emotion: *"Throw these despising words upon the munificent philanthropists who just drop before these "Pretenders" a few coins and are moving away with the satisfaction that they had saved the world in distress and had earned their blessings; or, you throw them before those scholars-in-arts who are in the habit of voracious reading and reproducing them movingly before the listeners: or, throw such words of despise before those men famous for their thundering orations from daises, touching on subjects like ethics and morals, sympathy, munificence and grace and mercy etc. These people will look with pity at these pretentious beggars! Then, they will go and yearn for a luxurious pomp of wealth, and its pleasures, which are derived from the exploitation of the poor! Let them crave for pleasures. No great harm in it. But, they are never in the habit of—nor have a mindset to—desiring from the heart of hearts to look forward to the dawn of the day on which all these social evils are routed out! Only those people are the true hard-hearted villains! Since you believe that these women are weeping really and not pretending, you too are one among them!"*

"Then, you are sure that these women do pretend grief?"

"Certainly. No doubt about that".

"Oh, shameful act! What a pity!"

"My dear friend! Are you aware of such things happening? A small child-at-arms would have died in the house, opposite. There must be none to take the dead child to the burial ground, nor would they have money for the funeral. These two women together must have offered to take the child to the burial ground, and they lay the child here and enact this drama and collect money. This is the business of the have-nots, unlike the business of the rich people of the civilised world which revolves around 'Banks-cheques-shares-capital investment, etc'.

"Oh God, I can't believe it" I told him.

"I know, you will not immediately believe this bare truth. You please come along. We will talk about this while we proceed to walk," so saying he walked ahead and continued. "If this sorrowful state of affairs-famine, poverty and unemployment rampant all over the country- persisted,

after some time, you would believe- or be pushed to believe- what would lay before us, happening everywhere.

“How will it be then?”

“Now, at least, they bring the dead baby of somebody else and lay it in the street, pretending grief and collect money. If the miseries of abject poverty on one hand and the luxuries of gorgeous wealth on the other are allowed to grow indefinitely, the parents – the original parents I mean – would themselves bring their child, if dead, to the street and make a scene like this to collect money so that they might earn something to feed their hungry stomach for the next day.”

“If this could be effectively prevented with the help of the police...”

“We can prevent it. But, you know, the truth is, only because of these curbing measures ie., curbing others from seeing the hardships and miseries of the poor, taken repeatedly earlier, the so called culture and civilizations have grown up thus far. If you extend this curbing still further, these people will bring the babies alive and leave them at the mercy of people like you at the roads and will run away; even days may arrive on which they will kill the child, bring it to the street and collect money, evoking your pity”.

“What can we do about it?”

“Good question. Let’s exert no effort. Let’s eat, enjoy and be merry! And then, go to sleep in a Luxury cot!”

“What efforts, are to be taken up by you and I? Tell me! Are we the cause of these misdeeds?”

“Yes indeed. You and I are the cause. You and I, and all others put together are the real cause for these misdeeds which had the cumulative effect of a potential threat to this society and this nation. Every one of us who has the hands to cast vote in the ballot box once in five years. *Are we not casting our votes in favour of those who canvass with the support of newspapers and magazines which trumpet and exalt, along with the claims of our proud past history and ancient traditions! Have we not failed in our sacred duty of electing the appropriate and meritorious candidates who have on priority the programmes for alleviation of poverty and unemployment which are the real cause of these menaces and misdeeds rampant in the society?* Therefore, we are the real culprits. And, there are culprits worse than us, who have sidelined and neglected highlighting the actual causes for these lapses that culminated in these misdeeds, and who

have thereby curtailed the spontaneous flow of real emotions of sympathy and affection towards the downtrodden and the underprivileged, who have on the other hand taken the pen, and occupied the dais for virtual entertainment producing nothing concrete, but useless claps and ovation. Do you know what we are doing altogether? First we turn those good men who believe in virtues and ethics be poverty-stricken; then they are changed to become merciless; then, they are subjected to neglect of the society which makes them become vandals and rogues. **Don't we have the capacity to change the pristine pure rain drops to become the most polluted drainage which is the abode of innumerable bacteria that produce countless diseases? Just like that, we serve for the complete change of those children who were orphan or deserted but born with pure hearts and possessing all good virtues of humanity; we first make them poor and deprived and when they are subjected to material and moral abandonment, they become merciless brutes; and at the end, we cause their total change - metamorphosis - as cruel rogues".**

The talk in this trend by my friend came to a full stop only when we reached the point of main gate to the Fort.* He stood still for a few moments. Then he began to speak again. "Look here" saying so he pointed out to me the building within the Fort* -rampart- where the national flag was seen unfurled aloft on the high mast. *"The destiny of Tamil Nadu is within the hands of the few people who have been sent here as our representatives. But sending those few is within our control. We who elect those few persons do not know how this country shall be shaped. We do not know either what shall be taught to those few persons who are to come over here as our representatives. Nor, we are aware whether those people are all genuine and true to listen to follow the instructions given by us. Somehow we send them here, following the appeal and request by somebody. Thereafter we rub our hands in helplessness, uttering big words like mercy, grace, kindness, duty, destiny etc. I don't know why they have called this kind of mockery "Democracy" saying thus my friend heaved a big sigh.*

"Do you hope and believe, my friend, that it might be possible to correct this world overnight or at lest over a year?" I asked him.

"They do believe that the whole world could be destroyed either in half - a- day or in half- an-hour using an atom bomb don't they?"

"That is possible, because of the development of science".

Fort means here the Fort St. George, where the Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly and the Tamil Nadu Secretraiat are housed.

"If the very same knowledge, which is used for destruction, could be used for constructive purpose, it is definitely possible".

"If only it is definitely possible, will they not take it up?"

"Those persons for whom this constructive change is possible expeditiously or instantly, are carefree, and they don't exert to do anything concrete and good, because, their life goes on undisturbedly and why and how they would care for this? They are not to lose anything if the poor and underprivileged would die in large numbers. If they could not and did not work for the atom bomb they are sure to have sleepless nights. Therefore, they venture out with an audacity and produce atom bomb. For the same reason, they do not include this subject to be covered in their programmes".

"Many people are not aware of the innumerable sufferings and miseries of the poor. Even the poor are yet to become really aware of their own sufferings and miseries".

At this utterance of my friend I was at once reminded of the miseries of the poverty of the artist. "Yes, it's true" I said these words spontaneously with a sigh. The chiming of the clock in the clock tower at the university was heard. I raised my head to look at the clock tower. It was quarter to six.

"What are you thinking?" my friend asked.

"Have you ever seen an artist at China Bazaar?"

"Are not all of them, artist there? Starting from big businessmen down to the last beggar there, from the taxi-driver to the rikshaw-wallah, and from pick-pockets to the palmists, each of them in an expert in one or the other art?"

"All these people you referred, are experts in the art of cheating. But I referred to a person who belongs to the real art of drawing".

"Doesn't he too sell his art there?"

"He never asks for anything from anybody. And he never stands before anybody with folded hands to get anything".

"Was that so. It itself seems to be an art. Getting money without asking, a flourishing art, which I thought was possible only to some swamyjee. But is it possible for the artistes too? Alright".

I told him with a little bit of resentment "If you speak like this cutting across everything that I talked about, it won't help".

"Well said. You proceed now. I'll listen".

"The artist in China Bazaar, you might also have seen him; haven't you?

"Go ahead".

"He is a lame man, poverty stricken. He just has a piece of charcoal. He draws pictures on the pathway near the Parry's corner. His drawings are very beautiful and his hands draw them very fast. Beautiful and attractive pictures are drawn by him unhesitatingly".

"Yes"

"Is it not a great art?"

"It comes through constant practice".

"It doesn't perfect by mere practice alone".

"Of course. Does he not get money?"

"Have you seen him ever?"

"When I was there some two or three weeks back, I did see him. Seven (or) eight people were standing there witnessing it. He was scribbling something on the ground. I thought that he must be a lunatic, and therefore people assembled there to look at him; hence, I went away from there. I was not aware of the fact that he was a lame man. You know, I do not usually go near a place where a group or gang is gathered. These people are ignorant, sans awareness and are actually blind believers of anything put before them, that was the reason why I shun from such assembly or gathering and move away. On that day also, I left the place for the same reason".

"You should have seen and witnessed it."

"Of what use will it be? I won't be learning that art; I won't venture to draw pictures".

"It is not for the sake of learning that art. He was also a poor man. But, a very good person. I have been to the hut where he lives; I saw his wife, a very good woman. I saw his boy; on the whole, a very good family".

"What was the reason for your closely examining him?"

"All because of the art. I went there with an inquisitiveness to know how the talent of art had entered into this poverty - stricken hut".

What has not entered, and centered around the hutments? Art, Chastity, ethics and values, murder, prostitution, and cruelty are all there”.

“These are all there in the houses of rich people too”.

“I don’t dispute it. That is why, I am saying that the differences of wealth and poverty among the people should be eradicated. Art, chastity, ethics and values etc., are seen with the rich people, so also they are present with poor people too. These two classes are not based on the birth of men. If only this classification is based on birth, we can altogether resort to abolish one race, and can take effort to save the other class. Why? We even can bring in a piece of legislation, separate one class from the other, and destroy the lower order with an atom bomb. Is there not a law in this land to protect the higher varieties of dogs and destroy the stray dogs of the lower order mercilessly? Don’t we have that mind-bent too? Like that, if the poor among the people were killed and eradicated from the land, we can abolish the political demonstrations. But, it is among the poor sections of the society, good people, valiant heroes, talented artists, able leaders, outstanding scientists and spiritual guides and philosophers are all born. That is why we cannot annihilate and destroy that class”.

“I also understand, that the artist I mentioned about, must also be an educated man. But I have not so far asked him about that”.

“Of what use will it be? We ourselves have witnessed directly that there are many graduates who suffer in penury.”

“None of these that I have stated so far were seen by you as new and surprising. Then, what else will be discerned by you as strikingly new?”

“What else, you ask? Strikingly new and surprising? Come here, I’ll show that” so saying he pointed out to me a scene, where a police constable was seen threatening and coercing a poor boy. Nearby, we could see three youths well-dressed, in pants and coat with folds of the iron-press in good shape. In front of them, a few college students were seen passing-by, laughing and revelling.

My friend went straight to the policeman and asked him: “What did this boy do?”

“Does he need to do anything? Even before he could do, he was caught. This chap has come with the intention to steal the bags and baggages” answered the policeman.

The boy broke down to speak in an agonizing voice: “No sir, I came here in search of a job, to eke out a livelihood”.

My friend told him: "We all have come here for that only; myself, my friend and everybody here including this man" and he pointed out the policeman while he spoke so.

The boy again continued "I did some odd job as load man, earned and had saved a few coins".

"How much could you save?" I asked him.

He said "I was having, three-and a quarter annas with me."

"Where has it gone? My friend questioned him.

"Resting here I had slept. Somebody wearing pant - and - shirt and all - they were sitting by my side. while I was asleep I just felt that some person was attempting to untie the knot in my waist. I at once was stirred out of sleep abruptly and I rose up. Then I came to know, oh sir, that I have lost the money." The boy's voice was in an appealing tone, while he narrated it.

"Absurd lie! Get lost, you, lazy pig!" abusing him thus the policeman put his latti on the boy's head. Immediately he turned towards us and said "This chap is pretending thus on seeing me. He is sending his eyes here and there, as though the coins were spilt on the ground. See, the looks of the thief."

My friend looked at the boy and said: "you just move fast away from here; otherwise, if you intervened to talk, our sir (pointing to the police man) will get angry" and so saying he sent him away.

Those three well dressed youths who were there on one side, spoke: "Pse, is that all? We thought that this will be the unearthing of a big case" so saying, expressing their disappointment they went away from there.

My friend and I were left alone. My friend talked to me: "This is what the 'new and surprising' thing that I have been looking for. This is the yardstick that shows the 'progress and advancement' of the present days. It was a fact that the boy had earned a few paise by working hard as a load - man. But while he was asleep, these three youths in pants - and - shirts the well dressed ones - had sat by him and had untied the boy's knot at the waist to steal the paise. Will that not fetch them atleast one cigarette each?"

"Could the policeman question them?"

"Oh, could that questioning be appropriate? Could he not give consideration to them as they are 'well dressed'? Those three youths are pick-pockets. They would be wandering neatly dressed without any shrink

of the iron-press. They may get an income in the range anywhere between three-and-quarter anna to three hundred rupees a day. See them, there! They have gone there and are sharing the coins among themselves" So saying he pointed them out to me.

I also saw them and 'stood there. "They will once again reassemble either near the restaurants or near the bus-stands. When the crowd is thick one among them will jostle a person on his right side and press him. Will not his attention be diverted towards that man on the right side? Right at that moment, another man on the left, will take out either the pen or the purse on the left side pocket of that 'jostled person', give it to the third man, stand there itself and get into the very same bus. At last, they will assemble at the end of the day somewhere in a big hotel and share their booty.

"How atrocious?"

"Leave alone the atrocity. You have forgot to appreciate their talent!"

"Hell with that".

"Don't say that. If only these people have applied and practiced their talent in the field of art they would have become good artists. But, then, they may not be earning money like this. They may not afford to have such modern and up - to - date dresses; have good and delicious food; have a brave and courageous behaviour at the sight of the policeman. These people also have come here to eke out a livelihood; they were once good; they have later gone astray as the society has abandoned them and they have become worst rogues because of poverty".

"Poverty is afflicting cruelty! Oh, what a pity!"

"Such exclamations will not help in anyway. You just change yourself to thinking this way: even if **Gandhi, Thiruvallurar and Buddha** were to be born one in each of the villages and towns, this world is incorrigible; and irreformable. But, only when the poverty is abolished, Gandhian principles, Thirukural sayings and the pathway to human kindness can exist in the world. You learn to think this way, hereafter".

"It is true and well said, in one way".

Not in one way; but you correct it as in all available ways. Do you know the foremost reason why I dislike poverty?"

"Because, it is poverty which kills and tries to destroy ethics and values, kindness and truthfulness. Is it not so?"

"Even if it is not so we shall be able to see beyond that. When poverty strikes, those who have faith and belief in ethics and values and kindness and truthfulness, do lament miserably and languish like that poor boy whom we have witnessed earlier. They try to live as good people and then get destroyed. But, at the same time, people who were caught up by poverty but were unmindful of ethics and values, kindness and truthfulness, rise up to the occasion like those three youths and become fearless rogues; they indulge in civilised criminal and cruel activities and lead a happy life. If they are good people they are spoilt by poverty; If they change themselves as bad and oppose, the same poverty will come to their rescue. **It was therefore, I have declared "poverty" as my sworn enemy.** Whoever comes forward to exert and endeavor for the mission of eradication of poverty are to me ..." He stopped his statement there incomplete. At that moment his eyes happened to fall over the array of cars that were parked there on the side of the pathway.

"What are you looking for?" I asked him.

"That car, it seems, must be that of Prof. Kamalakannan. It appears so!" he said.

"Doubt will be cleared if we could go near and look at it. You know his car number. Don't you"? so saying I neared the car.

"The same car 7775. (Seventy Seven Seventy Five) exactly the same," my friend said.

We went near the car. We saw the glass shutters were raised and locked.

"Mostly he will come to the beach by walk. To - day he had brought the car". He said.

"Perhaps, the madam (his wife) must have accompanied him".

"May be. We will also walk to the waterfront, to the foreshore. Perhaps he might be there. If we meet him there we can also talk to him for some time".

Earlier I accepted his proposal, and walked for some time; and later; I changed my mind. It appeared to me, that if we want to know about the madam - his wife - we shall watch them from a distance. I told this to my friend.

"No, no, what a bad habit is it? We should talk straight to our teachers, mingle with them freely. We shall never resort to hide ourselves, and peep into them like C.I.D. 's" so saying my friend began to walk.

"Kumaresan, Please! For my sake" I requested him. He at once stopped. "I have no bad opinion on him; not even an iota of it. Only because of my affection I resort to do it. Truth is unfolded on several occasions only through such means. You, please be with me, for my sake" I told him.

"Probing the life of others thus is very bad; and, does it not betray your bad taste of mind?" he spoke to reveal his bitter displeasure.

"What else you are doing while reading great epics and novels? If there is bonafide intention to seek and find the truth, what's wrong with that?"

"Some unknown artist, who is a lame man, having lost his legs. You go to his hut, meet him in person, along with his wife and son and try to find out directly something. But, here, in this case, you would like to hide yourself thus and..."

"O.K. we need not hide ourselves. We will go there and sit by the side of that bush. We will try to find out where the professor and the madam are. If professor happened to see us we will go near him. Otherwise we will simply be there looking at them."

"For some reason or other, I don't like it. How can you have a mind like this to prob people, who are well known to us and close to us, unnoticed?" he spoke.

"Again, please for my sake, today alone". I told him.

He answered "yes" and went to sit by the side of the bush. I also went close to him, thanked him, and sat along with him viewing the sea front.

As usual, vendors who plough the length and breadth of the Marina Beach came near us; all and sundry items like Icecream, muruku, vadai, sundal (boiled pea nuts and grams)* etc., were brought to us in succession and the vendors who sell them tried their level best to cajole us into buying them but we did not yield. Finding us to be hard nuts to crack, they moved away. To our right side, two aged people were walking at a slow pace with

* These are all small-time eatables. being sold in hand loads of tins and vessels in afternoon in Marina Beach. The regular beach-goers revel in purchasing and relishing on them.

walking sticks in their hands at some distance away from us. Opposite to us some fisher-women folk with baskets of fish-load on their heads were walking fast, even-while they were discussing something with anxiety. I just turned to our left. As usual, small children – boys and girls have gathered at the “play - and merriment” enclosure. Near the slide, * there were usually large number of boys and were seen thronging the slide in far exceeding number to its capacity. No one could play in the slide and there was a tumult of utter uselessness around the site. There was one boy-a sturdy chap-who was obstinate and rude who made his way amidst them advanced to the top, stood there, slipped and slided and ran around. On seeing him, there were other few boys who followed his path in the same manner. Thus, two or three sturdy and rude chaps almost seized the ‘slide’ atrociously and possessed it to themselves. Other soft-natured boys and girls did not dare to go near and interfere with them and they gave way to the roguish chaps. I showed it to my friend. I called him to go over there with me, and bring an order among these children, so that every one of them might get their chance to play in the slide.

He spoke “you cannot bring an order by enforcing a turn among them to reform them. It was how almost all the discourses and directive principles including justice and order, that were sought to be enforced through these polite means of imparting the people of world with ethics and morals have utterly failed. Here, the boys and girls are unmanageably very large in number. But, there is only one ‘slide’ here to play with. If you go there and preach your ‘Varnashrama Dharma’ based arrangement, perhaps it might last for some time; then, sooner it will ends in chaos”.

“If so, what to do...”.

We shall bring and set up here two more slides to play with. Even after that if the crowd persists unmanageably, you have to bring in two more slides into the scene. Or you can do one thing. Adapt a system of permit chit or slip. Each one of them should be given a slip and thus they shall be regulated, without giving room for difference”.

“Oh god! Is there so much of nuisance and trouble in this small game?”

“If these children happen to remain at their respective homes this kind of “enforcement of law-and-order” is not at all necessary. If they come and assemble in a public place and mingle with each other all these rules are

* Slide: Inclined plane down which children slide to lower level and play merrrrily.

necessary. You know traditionally we follow an order, a system of regulation to keep right in going around a temple during worship, ie: going around clockwise. Why is that being practiced there? Because of this regulatory custom, people do not come around pel-mel and disorderly; there was no occasion for anyone to collide head-on; people go around the temple one-by-one in an orderly manner. No one resorts to go around the temple on their left side and no body comes-across to check others' passage. If we needed to have regulation in the temple, should not we have such a regulation in other places too?"

"That was what I asked you for, to come with me and regulate the boys there. Please come" I again called him.

"It won't be of any use. That would be like the vain effort of individual philanthropists who give away alms and offer patronage and try to upkeep and maintain the needy world. Hundreds of munificent philanthropists had lived in the world, but even all their efforts put together could not eradicate poverty from the earth. If a good government of a welfare state is established we do not at all need to have philanthropists. Our going to the children's play field and trying to regulate them will be similar to the act of the munificent philanthropist who would try to alleviate poverty and save the people. If only we post a guard or a policeman there and vest them with powers to regulate them and enforce a 'queue' system, the moment they raise the latti or cane order will be perfectly restored. An act in itself is not a great thing; it is the planning and implementation of those things with appropriate authority is highly laudable" saying so, he remained there showing no effort to go with me.

"What's wrong with you? Whatever subject I preferred to discuss with you, you are able to drag in politics". I expressed my discontentment with him.

"What do you mean by politics? The concept of state and polity is this: we in our social and community life, live together in villages, and towns, which put together form countries and ultimately form to be the world as a whole. Was that not the common and unifying factor basis for all? If a man goes as a recluse and make the Himalayan hill side as his abode, making himself alone and aloof from the world, doing penance and meditation with his eyes closed, he might not be in need of politics. For him even, if he ventures to talk to some body he had to court politics; if he establishes a Matt he certainly needs the help of politics. Therefore, you and I can never think of giving up politics" he spoke thus elaborately.

The lights on the lamp posts along the Beach Road began to shine brightly. Even though the sun had set, the light of the day was still there. I just looked in the direction of the lighthouse to see how it emits light. It was revolving round and round just as the thoughts that had come up in my mind and was shedding light brightly. I looked into the direction of the sea. I saw a ship moving towards the harbour from the southeast direction. The ship was well-lit, and its appearance amidst the blue sea was beautiful with special effect. My mind was also gently floating along with the moving ship. "There, he is coming" I heard the voice of my friend, and turned to see in the direction where his hand pointed out.

The Professor and his wife were coming, talking gently and walking at a slow pace. The Professor was seen with his eyes set on the path they walked, while his wife was seen looking at his face and the pathway on the sand alternatively. When they came near the place, where we were, we stood up. As the light had receded and it was getting dark, even if they had seen us they could not have identified us easily. They had not seen us. We could hear they were talking; but we could not grasp the words clearly.

"What, next, would you like to do? At least let us go near them and wish them when they board the car" my friend called me. I just accompanied him. They were just nearing the car and we both reached them. "Are we going home straight?" The Professor asked her. She answered in the affirmative in a sweet voice. My friend went before them and wished them "Vanakkam". "Oh, it's Kumaresan! Welcome! Who has accompanied you, it's you Thiruvengatam! You are also welcome! Where have you both ventured together?" The Professor received us happily and remarked. "We just came to the beach" we answered him.

"We two were till this minute there whiling away the time. Don't you see us?" Replying to us thus, he told the madam, "You know Kumaresan already. This young man with him is his friend and is well known to me. He is Mr. Thiruvengatam" Myself and Thiruvengatam wished her "Vanakkam Madam". The madam returned the greeting, "Vanakkam".

"Yes. Have you any news?" the Professor asked us.

"Nothing Sir. Well, all are good. You shall please start. We will come to see you afterwards". My friend replied on behalf of both of us.

He got into the car and sat at the steering wheel. The lady also got into the car on his left and closed the door. "OK" said the Professor and sent upon us a very gentle look and started the car. The lady also looked upon us with a smile and gently waved her head. The car sped away and vanished.

I asked my friend "What shall be the mother-tongue of the madam? There is a little difference in her accent".

"Which state she hails from?"

"About three years back, he went to Bombay. He spent his three months vacation there. While coming back, he came along with the lady. Only that much is known to me".

"It seems she has learnt Tamil very well".

"I think she knew Tamil already. She is thorough in English. *Any person, who is well versed in one language, can easily learn any other language*".

"On the other hand our people are directly opposite to it. When they have Tamil as Mother Tongue, they are very particular to cling to English steadfastly. Those people are ardent lovers of their mother tongue. But, this lady, unhesitatingly talks fluent Tamil!".

"This lady will not give room to personal values that might be hindrance to language. As far as my knowledge goes, she is good, knowledgeable; a perfectly matching wife to the professor with an outstanding character".

"It appears to be so".

"What next? Let us move. We will board the bus in route No.27. I will get down at Egmore. You can continue the travel and reach Amaidhakarai" said my friend. We straight went to the bus-stand, waited for the arrival of that bus. Our eyes were travelling here and there on the old books spread on the book-shop which was near by the bus stand.

ON the next day, as soon I came out of my office in the evening. I willingly went to Parry's Corner. This evening also, the artist was not to be seen there. I thought of his whereabouts, might be somewhere, in some unknown street engaged in his art of drawing pictures. It flashed in me that perhaps he might have stayed at home. I wanted to rule out this possibility by going to his house. I boarded bus No.15.

While I was in the bus, the statement of my friend about me reappeared in my mind. He had said that probing into others life without their knowledge was a bad habit. I replied him that this was what we were doing in stories and epics. It appeared to me now, even more clearly than before, that it was a bare truth.

We read the great epic in Tamil, 'Silappathikaram'. During the early days of his married life with Kannagi, Kovalan was leading a happy conjugal life and extolled her, addressing her, "Purest of gold, Pearl of outstanding brightness, yielded by a chank of right spiral, a rarity!" Then for reasons best known to him his love shifts to Madhavi, a damsel with an enchanting beauty about her; his craze and fascination for her were so deep that he is entangled with her inseparably and enjoys all the pleasures of life. Then, suddenly, on a particular day, in a musical clique that cropped up while they were merrily singing in the beach, he abruptly leaves her, with bitter hate towards her. He returns to Kannagi, takes her to Madurai and they were put up at Madhari's house at the outskirts of Madurai, where he again adores his wife Kannagi saying "My dear sweet! Bright as gold! Gentle and soft as a creeper, having long tresses adorned with flower!" and he hugs her with great love. All these things are visualised before us while we read it. We remain unseen while we peep into the scenes where Kannagi, Kovalan and Madhavi are brought alive before us. We do probe into their life even without their knowledge, and we do assess and evaluate their life critically. May be it was because of this, stories and epics are giving us immeasurable pleasure! When a man peeps into and probes into the life of others, his mind tastes some sort of pleasure. But will it be possible to probe into the life of this artist without his knowledge? Not at all. It is a small hut. As soon as I went there and stood before the hut every one of them would recognise my presence. Immediately the artist would appear there. We would begin our conversation. Then, howsoever I might try, truth would not come up directly. Man will usually pretend and act before persons

known to him; then he assumes certain outward appearances, which are false; therefore, his real character is suppressed and not made known to others. If you are desirous of finding out the real person in him, you should do so when he is alone; or, when he is in the company of his wife and children, when probably he might be open in his disposition without hiding himself behind veils and without closing his mind behind a curtain.

When I was thinking a lot of probabilities like this, I heard: "G.C.I.M* (Government College of Integrated Medicine) may please get down" I responded to the call of the Conductor. I just shed off the series of thinkings that have cropped up in my mind and was prepared to get down at the next stop, from where I could proceed straight to the slum area.

Getting down from the bus at the next bus stop, I just walked straight to the hutments after taking the branching-off passage. As on the previous occasion, the dog in the slum came before me and barked aloud. As a devoted leader who is engaged in constructive work unmindful of a tirade of abusive words that were launched by the opponents, I was least bothered about its barking and went ahead. Its barking slowly ceased. Just as a great tower-bell would knell at high pitch initially reaching out to all directions, would then slowly die down, the dog's voice also slowly receded.

I reached the hut and stood before it. I bent and looked inside. The artist was lying down in a tattered mat and he was trying to make the baby by his side sleep gently patting on it. I wished him "Good evening".

He was surprised to hear and see me and he at once rose up and sat. "What, Sir?. Why are you here? Pity you, why did you exert yourself to come to the huts of these poor people, all the way?" said he.

"Now-a-days, college students- boys and girls- used to go to slum areas and engage themselves in voluntary social services. It is part of the curriculum for them, which is mandatory. Therefore, what's wrong in my coming over here?" I asked him.

"All right, please sit down" so saying he gave room for me to sit down in his tattered mat and moved away.

Eventhough I uttered the words like slums and voluntary social service, it was a bit repulsive to me – a feeling of awkwardness – to sit on the mat. I just spread my hand kerchief by the side of the wall and sitting down on that, I told him "this will suffice".

* GCIM bus stop was the present Kilpauk Medical College Stop. KMC came there in 1960s. The GCIM had been shifted to Arumbakkam, in 1970s. It is now near the Arch, and Entrance point to Anna Nagar.

"I am sorry to make you sit like this" he told me.

"Regarding me, you shall not think like that. Then only I can come over here often and mingle with you". I said so. He did not speak. He remained calm, with his head bent down. "where is your wife? Where has the boy gone?" I asked him.

"A house is being built in the nearby locality. She has gone there as a masonry worker. I have asked the boy to go over there, to keep waiting there, and bring rice while coming back home", he replied.

When he uttered these words a feeling of sorrow and sadness flashed for a moment in his face and then vanished. When he sported a smile to hide his feeling, the tinge of sorrow was very much visible. When I listened to his statement and I looked at his face, I was grief-stricken.

I stood up, telling him "Please wait for some minutes" and I started to go out.

"Why, why have you started" he was puzzled.

I told him, "If there is anybody here, I will ask them to buy rice for you, I have money with me".

"Sir, please don't do that. If at all you give any money to any one of these poor people you cannot get back the money. Everybody here is poverty-stricken, desperate for a meal for the next-time to eat. You please sit down, and don't go" he pleaded with me. "I have uttered these words unaware of its effect on you" he said.

I told him, "I will go and fetch the rice" saying so I moved one or two steps.

"Oh no, Sir! please don't do that. I request you, you please hear me "saying so he just moved swiftly towards me.

Having no other alternative left with I sat down as before with a heavy sigh.

"We are very much used to these adversities. After the sunset, and after the lamps are lit on, we will buy rice and will have our cooking. If, you now resort to change it by your munificence and giving money to us, even on days to come, perhaps we might be changed with a mindset to expect for somebody to come to our help and give money. Ultimately, we will be put to more sufferings and miseries", he told me.

His words pierced my mind like pin-pricks. I took his words in helplessly. Even if I wanted to send Money Order he might hesitate to receive. How can I help such a person? There is only one way left. When all others will be showering him with coins when he draws at Parry's Corner, I shall also contribute my mite and the amount shall be a big one, that was what I thought of doing in order to help him.

I asked him, "you have not been to China Bazaar, yesterday as well as day why?"

"Yes. I didn't go there. Have you been there and searched for me?" he asked.

"Yes. I had been there. But then, I thought that you must have gone to some other place," I told him.

He said "I have no other place to go. Where else can I? Very rarely I resort to go to Mount Road*. It is somewhat a far off place to me. It will be a terrible trip to me to alight at Park Station and go there and return to Park Station. Moreover the police people there have no mercy at all. Even if I resort to draw at a corner so as not to be a trouble to anybody, they don't allow me, rather they drive me away".

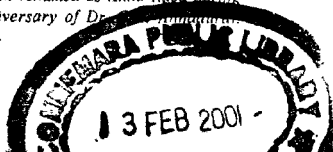
"What about China Bazaar?" I asked him.

"If I begin to draw at a place at least they have the courtesy to say "Not here; please move a little distance away". If I moved to the farthest place in the Parry's Corner there is none to question me", he replied.

"You didn't even turn up, yesterday?" I asked him.

"If I wanted to go there often, Ponni (his wife) won't allow me to go fearing that it might inflict upon me too much trouble and exertion. Besides, if I resort to go over there more often than not art will become familiar to breed contempt, and in due course lose its value. Then the viewers may become sinister and they might not drop any penny to patronize the art. Therefore, I have cultivated a habit as a rule, that if I happen to earn considerable rupees on a day, I will restrict myself not to go for drawing for the following days counted in number equal to the rupees I earned that day. On the previous day I earned five rupees. Hence, as per my resolve and restriction I will not stir out of the house for the next five succeeding days", he said.

* Mount Road, the great artery of Chennai had been renamed as Anna Road during 1980s in commemoration of the 75th birth anniversary of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, endearingly called "Arignar Anna" by all Tamils



“One rupee per day. Will it be sufficient for all the expenditures?”

“It is quite sufficient for getting food. It will not at all be adequate for other sundry expenditures. Therefore, my wife Ponni is going for coolie work on some days. Of course, I am not at all willing to send her for work. But, sir, what to do?” he spoke with sadness bubbling in his eyes. “Besides, of the five rupees, a neighbour had borrowed two rupees. If refused, it would result in hatred; if I lent it, it wouldn’t come back. On one occasion the man in the third house did so. He borrowed from me and forgot to give back. He courted enmity and thereafter he would never speak with me. I don’t have any displeasure over this with them. Abject poverty, struggle for day’s bread being a daily affair- these have made them bad people” he said.

Facts and truths that I have never seen or heard of were coming out of his mouth spontaneously and I was hearing them attentively, without a word in reply.

“If only rice was there I would have cooked food by this time. Ponni is a good woman. She would come back after a day’s hard work. She would be very much hungry. On the days when I return from my avocation, she would keep something to eat for me and give it to me” he said.

“It will be all the more agonising to leave the child at home and go to work for the womenfolk” I remarked.

“It is but natural for all these people living here. On the very next month after delivering a baby they will go out, leaving the child, to workspots. Why, even when they are in advanced pregnancy-upto eight months - they used to go for work. Even Ponni herself, when she was carrying this child, went for work. I strove hard to prevent her from going to work in advanced stages of pregnancy, but I could not help it. When she was pregnant, I would be going daily to China Bazaar, to draw pictures. But on those days, I could earn only a paltry sum, a mere eight annas to ten annas daily. Those were horrible days” so saying he heaved a sigh.

While I was looking at his face, during this narration, my heart was melting with emotions and empathy.

“I only feel that these experiences are horribly agonising and torturous. But people who live here, take it as easy as natural” he said.

At that time a voice was heard calling out “Anna, Anna!” (it means elder brother in Tamil) At this voice we both turned to see the person who called out.

"Please come, sister, what do you want?" he asked the person who arrived there.

It was a frail, but fairly beautiful woman of about thirty years of age. Her face was sad and she entered the hut. On seeing me she was a bit hesitant to talk further.

"He is very close to us. You can talk in his presence", he told her.

She then began to explain her plight. "I am very much perturbed and pained to think that he might be coming home any moment. As the time closes, I do not know what to do. I will immediately go home. You please come there after ten or fifteen minutes. You shall be there and wait for his arrival. When it is time to light the lamp my heart begin to tremor out of fear psychosis. He beats me black and blue. I can no longer bear with it, Anna" she was sobbing throughout while she spoke, and she wiped her tears.

"Don't weep sister. I will be there, you may go. But one thing; be submissive and keep patience. Howsoever he might scold don't spit harsh words in return. Surely in due course his mind will get changed. We have to put up with it for a few more days. Please go home, I will follow you after sometime", saying so, he sent her off.

She too went away, wiping her tears.

Looking at me, the artist spoke: "She is a very good woman. She is as good as gold. When I came first to this hutments in search of a place she gave me a roof to stay under and gave me food and took care of me. It was she who caused to bring Ponni and myself to be united to protect each other. Alas! She has just lost her new-born baby and not even a week has passed. She could not go for work. She had become weak and has been reduced very much. If she goes for cooli-work, she can earn and cook food at home. They both can eat, there may not be any quarrel between them. But, what can he do? He is also basically a good man. All on a sudden, the company in which he was working, resorted to retrenchment. He lost his work because of that. He could not easily get another job. There is no money on hand. Happiness had departed from the home. Due to worry and suffering his mind has lost its balance. He beats her, kicks her, and tortures her. I am also trying to help him, to the extent possible. But, you see, presently I myself am in trouble, due to my inability to make both ends meet. I can't extend any help to them, I am sorry to say".

While I was listening to him, I just turned back. I happened to see two drawings at the wall drawn with a piece of charcoal. The mud wall was having a coarse surface, not treated with mortar, nor was it white washed.

Therefore, those two drawings were not well discernible. I looked upon them closely. I could see the figures of Ponni and the child drawn.

"I was never in the habit of drawing here. One day, Ponni was very much obstinate in her request: she asked me to draw some picture so that she could see and enjoy it. I drew her sketch and figure exactly. She asked me to draw the picture of the child also. When I conceded her request she felt immeasurably happy", he said.

"How exactly you have reproduced the figure! Excellent!" I admired him.

"It all comes handy, with constant practice" he said.

"Really great is this art! But, you have not drawn the legs!"

"Hmm, yes" expressing this in a whispering voice, he just turned his face the other side. I could not understand what was in his mind.

At that time he heard the voice of Ponni and her son Thoppan nearing the hut, and he said "They have come".

As soon as Ponni entered the hut she looked at me with a puzzled expression on her face and exclaimed "Is he the sir who came the other day with us to our house?"

"Yes, it was I who came here the other day", I told.

The artist looked at her hands and the hands of her boy and finding them empty he asked "Where is rice?"

"They didn't pay the wages today, because they have no money" she said.

He asked "How is it? These people who have plenty of resources to construct their own house, resort to tell about paucity of funds, when they have to disburse the daily wages for us".

"They might also be facing troubles and inabilities" so saying, I took out two rupees, waved it to the hands of Ponni and told her: "Please go and fetch rice. It is already getting late".

He intervened to tell Ponni "Get only one rupee. That is enough". He looked at me with a sense of gratitude. He told me "If we take two rupees today, we would immediately spend it. How can we settle our dues tomorrow?"

At once Ponni took one rupee from me and started to go out. As soon as she went out the child began to wail aloud, She immediately came back, took the child, and again went out. As she was about to leave along with the child, the artist told her "Why can't you leave the child here?" But she replied him "Ayyo! I fed the child in the morning. The whole day had passed. Will it not weep?" and she moved out with the child-at-her-arms.

"We will go and sit outside. It will be airy there" saying so the artist moved out.

It was getting dark inside. There might not be kerosine to light the lamp. I thought that that was why he asked me to go out, and I came out of the hut. I sat before him and asked him "Are you teaching the art of drawing to anybody here?"

"I don't have such an idea. I do not like to impart this art to any of the poor people".

"Then you would like to impart this art to rich people?" I asked him.

"That is an entirely different issue. This art is not at all necessary to these poor folks. Instead one may seek to teach them letters to make them read and write" he answered me.

"If you could teach them letters, to make them read and write, and if the pupils who learn from you, would pay you their tuition fee it will supplement your income in a way. The teacher job fits you well, considering your physical condition"" I told him.

He heartily laughed at my suggestion and proceeded to say: "Firstly I am illiterate, I don't know to read and write. Secondly, there is nobody who would be prepared to give tuition fee to learn to read and write. In fact they have no resources to pay for it. **If a child is sent to school to learn- to read and write—the Government shall make an arrangement to pay an allowance to the family of that child- at the rate of Rs. 2 to 3 per month. Perhaps, such an arrangement may induce the families to send the children to school. This may be a motivation or this will prove an incentive for sending the children to school. Or else, they shall enforce a rule by which a family, which fails to send its children, will be imposed with penalty and punishment. This will coerce them to send the children to school. There may not be a third alternative than these two ways**" he said.

I was greatly astonished and puzzled to hear from him that he was an illiterate and he did not know to read and write. His claim to that effect

was unbelievable to me. I was briefly silent over that. Then I asked him. "why shall not the poor people learn the art of drawing?"

"Due to poverty, they would wither and die".

"In the case of you....." I started to talk about something, but quickly realising my mistake I stopped.

He continued: "Please, don't mistake that the people who are the viewers of my drawings are patronising me by dropping coins at them, only on seeing my artistic talent. They look at me and find that I am a lame man; that, eventhough I am lame as I still do draw pictures they are struck with sympathy blended with novelty. That is why they part with coins for my drawings! If only I was a blind man and resort to draw pictures, they would certainly give away more coins when their novel sympathy will be coupled with surprise and amazement!"

A man who could read the minds of the people so minutely, yet with so much precision and clarity, can he be an illiterate? Can he ever be uneducated? these questions repeatedly pestered and pierced my mind.

"Poor people can learn this art" I told him.

"Pardon me, you may not be aware of the exact truth about this. In the field of arts, all the experts can not come up in their life. The world will demand only a very few who have the opportunities and the due publicity for them. Only those people alone can come up in their life; and they alone can drive away their poverty and starvation and the status of deprivation. If there are one thousand carpenters – (craftsmen)- in a country, all the one thousand men will get a job and earn their livelihood. When the number of these craftsmen- carpenters- is doubled, and has risen to two thousand, then perhaps there might be some struggling and suffering. Even then, they may be able to make a hand-to-mouth existence. But, if there are hundred musicians, - say, experts in music – in a country, then, only ten out of these hundred can earn name in their field. Even among those ten, the country will seek and demand one or two. And only these one or two musicians will earn money with fame and name and amass wealth. The remaining eight musicians, - the experts so to say – will subsist with a modest livelihood. The left-over majority among them, those ninety musicians will not earn a single paise with their talent and skill. If they were stubborn to believe that their talent in art will feed them, they would starve to death. If ever they want to undertake some other avocation out of madness towards their art, they might suffer, not being able to do their new job perfectly. It is not only in the case of music, it is almost

applicable to all forms of arts like Drawing, sculpturing, Acting, poetry, story writing etc." Thus he gave a lengthy explanation to my inquisitive suggestion.

I told him: "Was it so aggravative and harmful? It was true indeed".

"Skill in handicrafts will nevertheless save everybody who have learnt it. But, on the other hand, those who were staunch believers in their talent of arts had almost at all times suffered to the last and had met with a miserable end. Art is horribly harmful. It will have a sweeping effect over the lives of thousands of people who will fall prey to it and will be destroyed. Art will give life but to a very few people. If the rich and privileged class believe in it they may have it as their recreation and entertainment. Poor people shall never have faith in arts. Art means sadness and misery in life. The Tamil word for art is spelt as "KALAI" THE WORD FOR MISERY IS SPELT AS "KAVALAI". So "art is misery" is well established in Tamil words".

When I heard this explanation I was simply aghast. The earlier questions were repeated in my mind: "Is he an illiterate? Is he uneducated?" These questions began to pester my mind further.

He continued: "Take for instance the plantain tree. (Banana tree). It may give rise to seven or eight saplings at its root. All of them when transplanted will sustain and grow. Handicrafts is like that. To whomsoever you impart skill in handicrafts they can have an existence and make a living. Take the case of Banyan tree or a Pipal tree. **It may yield millions of seeds. Among them, only three or four seeds will get a chance to come up and grow into very big and gigantic trees. All the rest, millions of such seeds will decay and get destroyed in so many ways"**.

"Your illustration about the prospects of those who were taught with skills in handicrafts is not acceptable. You see, in practice, even some of those who have learnt the skill of carpentry, Tailoring, weaving etc are suffering due to unemployment. Is it not?" I interrogated him.

He replied: "Unlike those artists, these craftsman need not face death due to starvation. They can change the variety of their product models and produce anything and get themselves engaged always which will provide them with a promise of livelihood. **If only there is a good governance in the state, the state will resort to protect everybody engaged in the production of handicrafts so that none of them is exposed to starvation death"**.

"How can it be?" I asked him.

“Take for instance, the cooperative sector. Are they not collecting milk etc., and sell them? Don’t they collect the goods woven and market them? Like that, these handicrafts should also be collected and marketed by the Government. Almost all the handicrafts goods should be collected, pooled and marketed under the control and responsibility of the Government. The retail sales of these goods will pose a great nuisance. Therefore, a branch or department in the Government shall take over the wholesale marketing of these goods. If the government announces that it would buy in the coming year only such of those goods which are in demand in the market, then the people -the craftsmen population -will engage themselves in the production of such goods which are in demand. Supposing, the production of wooden chairs is very large and they have accrued a huge stock in a year, and the Government issue a notification to the effect that the demand of wooden chairs has gone down and it may not be in demand in the coming year, then the carpenters in the state will change their production and fabrication to wooden tables and almirahs. Moreover, the govt. may also specify the restriction or limit the purchase of stock from each craftsman, provided that restriction specified by the Government should also guarantee minimum income to the craftsman.

“What about machinery and tools and plants and factories?” I asked him.

“These machinery, and tools and plants should be engaged in the field of production of those goods which are in the higher side of the demand but could not be produced or fabricated in large scale. Factories with tools and plants and machinery which would cause unemployment for craftsmen and retrenchment for workers on a very large scale shall be closed”.

“What about the job opportunity and livelihood to the owners and proprietors of these factories which would face closure?”

“The owners and proprietors of such factories and establishment will be very few in number say about a dozen or score, whereas the workers and craftsmen whose subsistence and existence solely depend on the handicrafts will be hundreds and thousands in number. In order to protect a dozen families to amass wealth and lead a happy life, it will be an uncivilised act to allow the families of hundreds of thousands of workers to languish in hunger and poverty! To be brief, it will be barbaric. Those dozen people can switch over to the job of clerical and accounting in the govt. depts.!”

“What will happen to the workers who are working in the factories and establishment which are to be closed and disbanded thus?”

"If there are one thousand workers in such an establishment, let eight hundred among them return to their home and get engaged in the industry of handicrafts. They need not go wandering from place to place in search of work. If they are engaged in the production of some handicraft goods and take that to the procurement centre of that locality run by the Government, then they will find that the Government officials here would be waiting to receive them and pay for their goods."

"Will there be bribery, corruption....."

"Oh, you fear corruption! If the govt. is actively present there between the workers who produce and the prospective purchasers, doing away with middlemen, then corruption, will have no place at all. Do you know what is the part played by Government at present? It now allows the middlemen to have their sway, between the producers and the purchasers, and it stands about as a spectator simply looking on their exploitation and swindling. When these middlemen grow up to enormous heights and capture their place, they turn towards the Government and begin to loot the govt. itself. Bribery and corruption grow up into giant size.

"Who are these middle men...?"

"These middlemen are none other than the merchants. Not retail merchants; they are the wholesale purchasers and marketeers and big merchants who buy goods on a large-scale and stock them, hoard them, await the opportune time and capitalize upon it".

"Alas! My father is a merchant. My elder brother is also a merchant in the same trade. There are my friends who are also merchants. Good many families which are in various trades do conduct their business just and fair. These families which are flourishing will soon lose their means of livelihood if they are deprived of their business and trade".

"Fears may be liars. You shall have no such apprehension. Do these merchants now lead a care-free life sans worries with their present trade? There are great many nuisances and harassment! The govt. have no faith in them. It does attempt to squeeze them to the extent possible. There are many a hardship like the assessment of income-tax and sales tax to which they are subjected to. In turn, they are attempting to evade these assessment proposals and eventually cheat the govt. Ceaseless struggle and peaceless existence of life. They are busy like bees in their struggle for existence in the business world. All on a sudden, one day, there comes a big fall; a sudden plunge in which they fall into a deep abyss. Many of these businessmen vanish into thin air; totally obliterated. Put to a lot of sufferings;

being thrown to the dust!. They are also like the artists in their struggle for existence. If there are a thousand merchants in the field, only two or three among will come up to capture the zenith place”.

“Really, it is a fact”. I said.

There was a sudden flash of lightning in the sky near the western horizon. I felt it as symbolic of the picture which was currently occurring in my mind. In the eastern corner, two or three street dogs began to bark.

In the neighbouring house, in front of us, three women were heard continuously talking some thing which grew up into trading of abusive words upon each other. When the artist was still talking, his words became inaudible in the tumult. Anyhow, I continued to listen to him keenly with my hands kept near my ear to get his voice audible.

He then continued “As long as the Government does not recognise the handicrafts industry and give it its due place, we have to assuredly say that man has not learnt to give respect to another man. Till such time, all these growing civilization will be like the dirge sung in a house struck with a tragedy. Sometimes these songs may also be good in music: but will it sound good music to those people with a heart which aches in others pain? It will not. On the other hand, it may sound a sweet music to those who have no heart at all”.

“Have you learnt any skill in handicrafts?”

“This is what I am very much worried to think about everyday. Had I learnt the skill in handicraft along with the learning of this art of drawing.....” So saying he stopped a little.

And, once again he continued: “No, no, even if I had learnt handicraft, it would be very hard to eke out a livelihood. Supposing I had learnt weaving, where and to whom could I sell the saree, that I had woven? At present, we don’t have a Government, which would compulsorily buy my product and patronise me. Indeed, this govt. is like a silent spectator, which allows competition between the produces of a big factory and the poor weavers’ productions of handicraft. If possible, the govt. shall purchase the textiles produced by that mill also. **The government should have the guts and fearlessness to tell the proprietor of the mills to stop its production for another six months, because, they are facing with an emergency in which they have to save several thousand families involved in production of handloom.** Now my position is one and the same. It makes no difference whether I had learnt the art of drawing, or skill in handicraft”.

Suddenly, he stopped talking, and keenly listened to some sound. Sound of beating and kicking was heard. "It is the voice of misery of that woman who came here sometimes earlier. Could you hear? I shall go there to her rescue" and he moved.

"I will also accompany you", so saying I rose up and walked behind him. We saw Ponni with her baby standing in front of a house where we reached. Ponni was pleading aloud. "Anna (elder brother)! Please don't do that! Please leave her! She has just given birth to a child and lost it. Leave her! Don't beat her!" But the husband of the lady in the house would not pay heed to Ponni's pleading. "She should get lost from the house; then only I will get rid of from my misery and penury".. So saying loudly he shook her, pulling her hairs. "What is it all? Please stop it, my brother-in-law!" Called out the artist. When he heard the voice of the artist he came out of the house and told him; "She shall quit from here mama (Uncle)! Then only my family will be all right" There was a small boy, standing and weeping inside the corner. The artist moved towards the man in the house. I took leave of the artist and moved from there.

My mind was very heavy with thinking. I just walked towards my home as though I was carrying a very heavy load.

5

THE next Sunday, it was almost six thirty in the morning even when I woke-up. After attending to the morning routine I just finished my morning tiffin when it become closer to 9.00 A.M. I felt lazy. When it struck nine in the morning my heart was very much willing to go over to Thiruvallikeni and have a chatting with the professor. I stood up and put on a shirt.

“Could I know the destination of your journey?” I turned back when I heard the voice of my wife posing me a question.

“Summa” just like that. Nothing important”.

“Today is Sunday. You had promised me to act as I wished this day every week.”

“No Nagu! You shall allow me a holiday only this Sunday.”

“Today you have a holiday in your office there; and you wish a holiday here in the home also. Then, where exactly is your avocation, I can’t understand” so saying she came near me to give the child in my hand.

“Please allow me a holiday today only” appealing so with a pleading look I moved away. The little boy seized the opportunity to cling to his mother and without leaving his hold on his mother he began to cry. I thanked him within my heart and slowly moved away from there and went out. I came to the main road and boarded the bus bound for Thiruvallikeni.

When I was nearing the residence of the Professor I saw the driver standing there. I asked him “what Sekar, are you ready for going any morning trip anywhere?” “If ever sir wants to go anywhere sir himself will drive it away. If the sir is having any personal work and the madam wants to go anywhere, she will go herself and then I will be driving it. It is for that purpose I have come here to ask their permission” said he.

“Is our Professor engaged in some work?” I asked.

“I don’t know Sir. I haven’t appeared before him. Madam only had seen me” he told.

I entered the house, climbed up the flights of steps to the first floor, stood near the door, and gently knocked the door with my fingers. “who is that ?” it was the voice of the Madam wwas heard. “I have come to

see Professor. I am Thiruvenkatam” I answered. After sometime, I heard the voice of the Professor “Please, come in”. I entered the hall. The Madam was not seen there. Professor alone was sitting there. He asked me to be seated in the sofa opposite to him. A revolving rack was standing there carrying lots of books neatly arranged. He was having an American monthly magazine in his hand. He just placed the magazine in the rack instantly, and he looked at me and asked “Hasn’t Kumaresan come with you?”

“I haven’t seen him sir”.

“Are you not meeting him often?”

“Of course we do meet. I have seen him four days back. Thereafter I was having a tight schedule and I had no rest”.

“That’s all we can do. In the life at Chennai, it may take some ten days to meet the man at the next door. In small villages their worry is to pass the time. In major towns and cities their worry is that “they have no time”. It was so even in America”.

“Besides, I am residing at Amaindhakarai and he resides at Ezhumbur (Egmore)”.

“Moreover, you are a married man with a family to be taken care of. Whereas, he is unmarried. He will move about anywhere as he likes, as there is nobody to question him”.

“He is working as overseer in the City Municipal Corporation. Hence, he has to move about from place to place. Is it not his duty to be on the move, Sir?”

“He had stopped his studies with Intermediate.* He is a good man. Because of economic compulsions he had to stop his studies. Had only he studied further and got a degree he could have gone to some higher job.”

“I have studied B.A. What have I achieved? Just a clerical job in the court. Is it not?”

“However, you have a bright future in your career. You may become a Gazetted Officer You may draw a four figure salary. But, in his case, he has to remain as a Supervisor for his whole career. Is it not so?”

“Sir, but he seems to be the least worried about that”.

* ‘Intermediate’ was a pre-degree course in the University. It was in vogue upto the early fifties (1950s), a two year course after school final (S.S.L.C). It was changed to P.U.C. in 1956, as one-year course. Even that was scrapped in 1978 when the H.S.C. or Plus two was introduced in Tamil Nadu State.

"Yes, He is not worried about that. He believes that, within that period a major revolution may happen, the class differences would vanish and the whole world would be reformed with the establishment of an egalitarian society. Poor fellow, he is a crack...."

By this time the voice of the madam was heard: "Will you please come in?" Then he went inside.

The cook entered the hall with a plate in his hand on which a cup of coffee along with peeled oranges were placed, and he put it before me.

"Sir, it is for you, please take it" said he. I nodded with a smile. He went away.

Professor came back and sat in his seat and said "Were we not discussing some thing?" He pointed the plate to me and said "Please take it".

"Yes, it was about the arrival of a revolution that Kumaresan firmly believes in...." so saying I began to sip coffee.

"Indeed, it is a false belief. We could see that many of the present day youths are mad after Marx. As years go on this madness will automatically subside and be cleared of. If only they get married the very next month their madness will be washed away. May be because of that Kumaresan refuses to get married at all" said the Professor.

"If we ask him about that he details before us innumerable reasons for that" I said while I began to swallow the peeled oranges.

"If only he could come here often, I would correct him with reasoning. Because of his not getting married, will all the poor people in the country become rich?"

"That might not be so. But, sir, through some means or other the sufferings and miseries of these languishing poor people should be put an end to. What shall be proper way for that?" I asked him. While I asked him this question the artist, his family and the whole slum was in my uppermost mind.

"The people shall stand united; they shall recognise and patronise scientific instruments and equipment's Just like in U.S.A. Our country shall also promote industries in many fields".

"At present it is said that even the existing factories do not find enough demand for their products from the market. In this state of affairs if

we venture to the opening of new factories, what can we do with the surplus? To which country can we export them?"

"You need not export them to any country. They could be consumed in our country itself. If you could upgrade the standard of living of the people, a balance could be struck. At present people live with meager belongings like two dhoties and one shirt, per person with a mat and pillow to sleep, and they take ragi porridge or mere rice as their food. This poor living standard should be totally changed. Everybody's standard of living should be upgraded to a high level. They should have a good home to live in; vehicles for mobility; good cot with cushion bed to lie on; high-class dresses and quality food items. Thus, if the standard of the public is risen to a very high level then all these articles of consumption will be in a very great demand. As the necessities and demand for comforts grows, the factories and establishments, which produces, those articles will increase in large numbers. These establishments and factories will generate employment opportunities in a very large scale and tens of thousands of people will get jobs in them. No one need to remain poor. They need not live in huts and slums nor live in streets and pavements; nor have their foods cooked on the platforms and pathways; nor wear rags and torn cloths and wander in the streets. But many of the people in this country refuse to have faith in science. If you spell the very word science, they are puzzled to hear it as though they have heard the word spirit or gin or goblin. They never entertain changes. Therefore, they just remain in the simple and crude life of barbaric ages and undergo a lot of sufferings. I have a lot of friends in America; they admire, appreciate and adore science. They simply have deified it. Can you imagine that because of science and through science, how far they have advanced, with giant strides? Even if it is a house of a peasant, he will have two cars and a lorry. He will have as many number of Radio sets as that of the rooms he has in his house. Therefore, the country needs so many number of radio sets and cars and so many other consumer articles which are to be manufactured and produced in their factories. Hence, industries in many different fields will thrive" said he.

"Even then, there will be a problem".

"What is that problem?"

"The proprietors will accrue a lot of money."

"What is wrong in such accrual? Money has to be with somebody. Let it be with them. Let them point out whether there is any harm or hardship to the workers. It will be enough if the three basic needs of the work force – food, clothing, shelter – are well met with, apart from other needs like

education, medicine and entertainment are made available to them adequately. After that what is it to us if the surplus money in the land is accrued and stagnant with somebody, somewhere? Why shall we bother? When almost all the farm fields are irrigated well, in adequate quantity. what if the left over water is stagnant in the lake or the surplus water spilled into the spillway and flowed?"

"Rich people and those who have amassed wealth thus, should be good at heart".

"We are thinking in that way after our experience we have undergone in this land. That is wrong. Here, in this country, the poor and the under-privileged have not faith in the rich and the privileged. They do not work sincerely. They commit breach of trust. The rich people also equally distrust the poor; and they can't repose confidence in them. This is a country where, from time immemorial, differences of castes and religions had manifested; where disunity, differences and enmity had been nurtured. Therefore, the excellent condition that prevail in America is not easily understood nor digested. In America, rich people are merciful and graceful, and the workers there are thankful and sincere. That is why their country is thriving in all ways and its people live a luxurious life."

Eventhough he had spoken thus elaborately I was still in need of clarity. It seemed as though I was flying in the mind, and I felt it something eccentric. The idea did not sustain. I was baffled as to what I should ask for next. Then it came up in my mind what George Bernard Shaw had once written about the performances of the democracy in U.S.A. His satiric writing so pungent with points of criticism about the corruptions and irregularities that had cropped up in large scale in America, where the noble and great men with pure thinking could not think of participating in the politics. Indeed I was about to quote him in this context and ask the professor some questions but at that moment I hesitated to do so. The servant came in and removed the plates.

He asked me "Would you like to have something? Some Juice?"

"Nothing else, please" I told him.

"I am told that there is an "Art exhibition" currently being run in Egmore. Haven't you seen it?" he asked me.

"I don't know, Sir, I haven't gone there" I told him.

"My wife has gone there. She asked me to accompany her. I was neither conversant in nor introduced to the field of art and drawing. I have

no liking for it. But she has some interest in it. Hence, I have sent her to go all by herself to the Exhibition."

"Drawing is an excellent field of Art".

"Of course it is an art. I don't understand why we should simply sit hours together and draw the pictures of trees, deers, child and woman. If we could capture the pictures of beautiful places and persons in Camera, we can get them enlarged to the required size and further beautify and enrich them. After the advent of photography we need not undergo the pain and strain to draw pictures by hand. Why should we have the art of drawing still in practice when multicolour cinemas and other things have come into vogue? All because of the mind which has no room for welcoming Science."

When I heard him speaking thus, I recalled my words which I had uttered to my wife sometime back, despising the photographed pictures and praising the pictures drawn by hand. Before this highly knowledgeable intellectual, I kept quiet without uttering a word, as though I accepted my defeat.

The Professor rose up from the seat as though he thought of something. He went to an almirah. When he came back, he came with four or five books in his hand. "These English books are all good critical reviews on Arts. Our youngmen should not miss to have read and understood these books" so saying, he brought me a book titled "Modern Painters" written by John Ruskin. He searched for a particular page and read out a portion in that page underlined by him. He took another book written by Richards and he was turning the pages in it in search of some other quote, and I was looking at him with rapt attention without speaking to him.

He then continued to talk: "We cannot tell the same comments about all the arts. Drama, Music and the like are needed still more and for ever. The modern science cannot create music formed according to emotions and feelings for which we are in need of artists only".

"Beauty is inbuilt and inseparable in a very good drawing."

"It is there; I don't disagree; that beauty is naturally inlaid; that could be captured through camera as a good picture. One need not sit and strain to draw it by hand."

"While the artist draws a picture his ability of drawing and imagination is revealed. He draws on a clean white paper with different varieties of colours; in the course of his change of strokes a beautiful figure appears. Does it not amount that the artist is now a creator who gives life to matter?"

"Of course, the artist has the ability and skill which are revealed while he draws a picture, Man has capability indeed, and, when he makes use of the yarn as warp and weft and weaves the cloth his skill is certainly revealed and the product appears nice and beautiful. But what to do with that? You just imagine, that innumerable varieties of cloths are woven in wagon-loads in a day in big Mills, and I ask you why then a man should exert to weave?"

If we could personally witness an artist while he is engaged in exhibiting his artistic talent, ie., while he is drawing picture....

"If you witness a man who is a cart-puller while he is engaged in his work, the muscles and ligaments of his hands and legs are exhibited well which is also very beautiful to look at".

When I was discussing this topic, the artist who occupied my thinking was none other than the lame man who was drawing pictures in China Bazaar. His talent was splendid and it has taken up my heart. I wanted to reveal it and make him feel; but I can't. His similes and metaphors have swept me and arrested me. At last I thought that if I narrated my personal experience with that particular artist, perhaps he might understand and I began to talk about him. He listened to me attentively with patience.

After he had heard me completely, he commented: " Instead of drawing on the street if he could get himself engaged in his avocation bound to the table in a factory, he can lead a prosperous life."

"Please tell me if he could get a job like that somewhere, he is ready to join duty; he himself had told me about it" I said.

"I have no such acquaintance with any of the factories. Besides, as our country is heading towards a recession, in an under-developed state, where can we get a placement for him? Only when the standard of living is raised and the number of factories increased....."

"Alas! What are we to do till then?"

"What to do? We have to undergo lot of sufferings and miseries like this. The world has to progress only gradually. Till such time we have to wait patiently."

To wait patiently means, to do what? Have we to wait, deprived of any means to have a second meal for the days to come?"

"What can we do for this, boy? Look into the history of the world. Centuries together and generations together people are put to a lot of

sufferings and had become prey to innumerable miseries and death; then only ray of light for progress had set in and people had experienced, the real advancement”.

“Before undergoing these agonising experience will not these poor people as a whole disappear?”

“Had not the human beings got destroyed in large scale due to wars and battles, as well as due to epidemic and pandemic diseases? It is also like that. We can not help it can we?”

The trend in his speech, seemed to be merciless and devoid of sympathy, it appeared to me. If it was somebody else, I would have retorted and shown him my displeasure. But how could I express my dislike in his case? Here I kept myself cool and calm without betraying my displeasure towards him.

“How are the ability and capability in arts cultivated?” I asked him.

“It all depends on sustained habit cultivated by an individual. A bank clerk counts the currency notes with ease. Have you ever looked at the speed with which a cashier counts the currency and disburses it? Particularly his nimble fingers? Haven’t you seen a young girl play trapeez; and walk on a rope in circus? All the capabilities attributed to nimble hands and legs are cultivated through repeated performance turned into sustained habit. This applies to the ability of the artist who draws pictures. He sees and enjoys almost all the things in the world and he enjoys the beauty in them. His eyes get accustomed to them through repeated perception of things in lines and colours. Thus, with that experience gained through eyes, he draws lines and figures and produces pictures. This is the product of the cultivation and training received by the sense of perception through eyes. If the eyes and the brain are trained so from a very young age, and are grown up in this direction, the art of drawing will come naturally. In the art of sculpturing, along with the sense of vision, sense of touch and feeling (tactile sense) will also develop. In the performing arts, take for instance, acting, facial expressions are in abundance, which will reveal the emotions. In music, the sounds blended with feelings and emotions expressed melodiously are being attentively heard and grasped by the ears and they gradually develop special skills in differentiating subtle nuances in sounds. In the art of poetry, along with the sense of hearing emotions of the heart will abound and be developed. In the art of story telling, along with these finer senses, sense of the mind, eye of imagination would also be developed. Thus, all the arts including fine arts are basically founded on the subtle and finer development of senses of different varieties in each way distinctly. There will be generally a defect or lapse in this development too.

In an ordinary man, all these five senses will have an equitous growth to a given extent and we can see a balanced growth of senses in him. But, in the case of these artists, one sense will have precedence over others and rule the individuals. Therefore, they would invariably lose their equilibrium – balanced state of mind- in their life. They will be yearning and wandering childlike. If they could not get what they wanted, and what they expected, they will languish in agony and misery as though the whole life is lost for them. If you resort to have friendship with these people, it will be very much a nuisance. You please avoid to have any contact with that artist”.

“I could not discern anything bad in that lame artist” I told him.

“You have not been closely associated with him. If only you did so you would know it. That man will be full of emotions to the brim. Otherwise, he could not have acquired skill in this art. All his senses, and through them his mind would not have acquired a balanced growth. Get closer to him, you will know the reality”.

“If only they have no balanced growth of senses and mind, how are these artists able to depict and highlight beauty?”

“The artist sees and realises the beauty and he reveals it through his art. If he is a musician, for him the beauty is in melodious combination of sounds. If he is an artist who draws pictures, then beauty for him is in the form of lines and colours. *These artists are viewing this world from a particular angle or point of view. They are capable of highlighting the truth of the matter from that view point only even more clearly and excellently than others. Only for that reason the world hails and admires these artists. Sans balanced growth of senses, these people in their personal life are incapable of leading their life successfully and they rot ultimately.* Those who believe them and depend on them are also ruined. The body of a man who gives work to his hand only will soon get destroyed. If a man gives exercise only to his legs his body will also soon decay. It is so with the man who gives work to his back only! **If all the parts of the body are engaged in work in a balanced manner, then the body will also have a balanced growth. That will give him a healthy body and longevity of life. Likewise, only when the senses have an equitous and balanced growth then his mind will also be sound. Otherwise, the mind, not knowing how to live in a proper way, will go astray and lead him towards destruction.”**

Only now I began to like and relish the speech of professor. Certain truths unknown to me so far, entered into my mind and began to radiate.

I heard a car entering the compound from outside. He listened to it attentively. "It enters our house". So saying, he stood up to look at the person who was coming in. "Welcome, Sir", he called out to the man while looking at him, and at the same moment he turned towards me and said, "The gentleman is the proprietor of C.T.F. Beedi Factory. A great and rich man". I said "Is he not the owner of the M.N.A. Mills at Shevvapettai?" "He said "Yes the very same man". "You too will please sit together and discuss here. I will have a stroll in the garden meantime". Telling him thus, I came down through the steps. The gentleman was getting up through the same flight of steps, and I gave him way. He was really "a big stommy stoat. As he was ascending the steps he was breathing heavily and his sigh heard then revealed the painful exertion he was subjected to while climbing up the stairs. He was in the habit of reaching the floors up, through lift. I thought of his difficulty to walk thus in this house where there was no lift. His headgear lines with Zari in it, and his silk jubba were in tune with the diamond rings he was wearing on his fingers. I thought that they should be left to themselves to talk leisurely, and I came down from there and went to the garden.

By this time, the servant came down to the kitchen: the cook became busy and he was taking this and that to be served; one plate was full of fruits and another plate was full of several kinds of biscuits. In another plate there were two cups of coffee; within some minutes all the three plates reached upstairs. I was all the while standing there and witnessing all the hustle and bustle. *The pitiable plight of the artist's family came to my mind.* The cook just wiped off the sweat and after heaving a sigh looked at me and said "what sir, you are simply gazing at?"

"I was simply looking at your buzzing activities and haste"
I told him.

"Oh you speak about my activities? It cannot just be narrated. If any guest arrives here I will be in a tight routine. The kitchen will be buzzing with very many activities. If the guest arrives here, we have to judge their status by the mode of transport they use-whether they came walking, or have come in the car; whether they are poor or rich; and whether they are officials or merchants. Then we have to prepare the plates and items according to their rank and status. If the guest is an ordinary poor man one plate will do; if he is a rich man we shall serve them with three or four plates. If we don't prepare it within five minutes and reach there to serve them we cannot look into the face of our boss (professor) for it will be purple in anger". So saying he just looked around with caution.

I thought that I had reached an appropriate place (to know things) and I was paying heed to his words patiently.

Then, once again he sent a searching glance at the stairs and around him, and then proceeded: "Moreover, to-day is Sunday. Someone or other will be coming throughout the day. If only Amma (Madam) was at home I need not bother. If Ayya (Professor) remains at home it means burden of work to us". Thereafter he paused for a moment and whispered: "Sir was also about to go with the madam; but, as you came, sir stayed back."

"Was it so? Alas! My arrival has burdened you with more work" I said.

"What does it matter to me, Sir? We are born to work. I await their order to do things. But they should pity us and they should increase our wages a little; will it cost them heavily? Every body, - whether they have any purpose or not to come over here - is coming to meet him; they arrive in their cars. They don't take in all that is served to them by way of hospitality; they sip in the coffee served to them; then they just touch other items and leave them. What is the cost per plate? Biscuit of high quality is purchased. When so much is spent, they are unwilling to give away a few rupees as wage-hike."

"How much are you paid a month?"

"Sir, we should not talk about our salary to the guests. If it goes to their knowledge, they will take it as a big wrong committed by us."

"You please tell me. I won't reveal it to anybody".

"I am paid a paltry sum of Rs. 15 per month. I can have my meals here. If there remains any food prepared but unserved, rarely once a while, we can take it home with their permission."

"Do you have a family?"

"If I am alone why should I worry about the pay and wage? Have I not stomachs to feed?" If only I eat to my content and work all the while will it be sufficient? Unaware of the implications I got married. Now I am suffering a lot".

"How many children do you have?"

Six were born to us. Three had gone; only three children remain."

"Of course, your pay is meagre and inadequate".

"Where and to whom can I go and plead my case? I am given to understand that our sir is teaching grown up pupils like you. Whoever will teach him these things?"

I looked at him with empathy and said:

"I think you are unaware of these things. How can you put the blame on the Professor and of what use will it be? Professor is good and merciful. But, you should know in big houses all arrangements are devised not by the menfolk there. Everything there is in the hands of the women there. You should make an appeal to the lady about your case. Her mind shall get changed".

Then again, he sent a cautious look at the stairs, and he came slowly nearer to me and said: "Indeed what you have said is true in general. It applies everywhere but not here. Amma (Madam) will not do anything without asking for permission from Ayya (Professor). In this house Madam is good and kind. But Ayya is not kind and is not generous. Three Pongal Festivals* have gone since I came here to work. I tell this as I am fully aware of that."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed over the revelation. Most of the truths are not easily known: it is identified only by those who are capable to discern it.

The servant came down the stairs. He was carrying in his hand the emptied plates with coffee tumblers. Other plates were left there itself.

"It seems they will be in discussion for a long time. You please keep ready the juice, soft drink etc., to meet the necessity", said the servant.

The cook asked him "What are they talking about.?"

The servant said "You know one young gentleman, by name Kumaresan, old student of our Ayya. Perhaps this sir must also know about him." So saying he looked at me.

"The talk between them is about him. He is said to be teaching bad things to the workers" he completed thus.

"Then, what followed next?.." I asked him with eagerness.

"Their talk is going on that way. They talk a lot; it was half English and half Tamil. How can I follow? The speech of the madam of this house is many times better than that". The servant laughed merrily.

Before solving a riddle one more has come out. After leaving the plates the servant moved away hastily.

* 'Pongal Festival' is a grand Annual festival of Tamils, usually occurring in the middle of January month, which is the 1st of Tamil Month "Thai". It is also called Festival of Harvest. The cook counts the year by the passage of the festival as is usual with the folks in this part of the land.

“What is strange about the Tamil spoken by Amma?” I asked the cook.

He said; “If Amma speaks, Tamil will be grammatically perfect. She will not speak in spoken tongue as we usually do. She came from north. Therefore, she speaks Tamil perfectly. Even though I have been here with them for years, some times, I do miss to understand something from her speech. Just like this, on few occasions, our spoken language is not understood by Amma. But she has improved a lot over these days.”

“Can she read Tamil well?” I asked him.

“Ayya! That is what is a regular routine for Amma. She is seen reading always. There is a book called “KURATHIKAL” or “KURUTHAKAL”. She is always seen with that book and reading it all times. Servant used to tell about it.”

I wondered what exactly be that book. I thought perhaps it must be “THIRUKURAL” which must be misspelt by this illiterate cook. Then I asked him “Whether it is * ”THIRUKURAL?”.

“Yes. That was it. She is seen reading it always. It is a small book. She repeatedly reads it. I don’t understand what is contained in that”.

I was listening to him with a sort of amazement, while I was standing and looking intently at his face.

“Even though she is so well-read a person, she is very modest and simple. She never does anything without consulting “Ayya”. But Ayya is hard-hearted. Therefore, whatever I may plead, it may not yield any result.

“You should also tell about this to Amma”, I told him.

“I once told her about this. She told me that she would inform this to the sir, but kept quiet and didn’t. Days are very harsh, unlike the earlier days. If I leave this place I cannot dream of getting a job anywhere else. People are waiting readily to avail the chance and enter here. Is this a Government job with job security? When I was preparing the pudding, if they decide to send me away, I would have to quit the job instantly without even thinking of frying the next item. This is a job of that kind. Let them

* THIRUKKURAL written by Saint Thiruvalluvar 2000 years ago is the Scripture of Tamils and its fame is well known around the world. The message of Thirukkural is universally applicable, transcending the barriers of language, nationality, religion, etc.,

increase the pay, if they have mind to give me something more. Or else, I have to bear with and pull on, accepting the present pay of rupees fifteen to continue”.

“Is this the way the Professor wants to direct for upgrading the standard of living?” I thought with painful displeasure about him.

“Sir, it is getting late” so saying the cook was about to enter the kitchen.

I made him to stop by asking him this question: “Whether Amma knows cooking?”

He answered: “She can prepare hot water; she can also cook rice, I think. She doesn’t know any other thing. She never peeps into the kitchen. When Ayya (Professor) is there, she will be in the hall or drawing room or somewhere else. When he is not at home, Amma will remain inside a room, which is exclusively for her. The whole cooking is left to me, reposing confidence on me. On the whole, she is very good and kind lady”.

“All right, now you can attend to your job” I said and began to move.

He once again came near me and told me in a whispering voice, “If I can have a cooking job in any other house, which will fetch me 20 to 25 rupees per month as wages, I will definitely come over there. If you could kindly find me one, please tell me sir”.

“Let us see. You can go”.

I told him and moved from there. I thought within myself, “is this the ‘help’ I can do to the Professor, whom I have visited as a guest”. However I had a lot of sympathy for the cook.

I heard the car, which had come there, starting from there. I just peeped out and saw the car moving from there. I just went upstairs hoping that the Professor might be expecting me.

“Where have you been?” the Professor asked me. His face was wrought with some serious expression.

“I have been down there, I thought I should not be a hindrance to your conversation...”

“Nothing of the sort. Will you not meet Kumaresan. If perchance you meet him, ask him to come over here immediately”.

I thought that what the servant had said was correct. The conversation should have been about him, I felt.

"Sir, I will meet him; and inform him. If there is anything to be conveyed to him in person, I am willing to do so." I told him.

"No nothing! Did'n I tell you earlier? The madness. Madness with Marx. It seems that he is lecturing to everybody that there will be a great revolution sweeping over the world soon, and the class differences between the rich and the poor will vanish from the earth. He is taking classes for two or three days a week for the workers of CTF Factory and others".

"How does he find time for all these?"

"He usually takes classes in the evening. Will a lunatic take any rest? He is always caught up in madness. This fellow staunchly believes it. What else can we say?"

He continued, "That's what I meant. A mad man had written that a classless society-egalitarian Society - will come into existence. Almost all these unmarried youngsters have firmly put their faith in it and are shouting it aloud. Nature has knowingly created ups and downs in the society. But these cracks are trying to change the creation itself and make all people equal. Can they succeed in their attempt to change the creation and win over it?" The very same Professor, who sometime back was talking about science and its greatness with its progress and achievements, has now, all on a sudden changed himself to talk about nature and its superiority. I was bewildered to think about the contradicting stance taken by the Professor for reasons best known to himself.

He proceeded further: "Nature has a lesson to teach humanity about how the society shall be formed, in its creation of the "bee-hive". It itself is a miniature society of bees. There are workers, servants, guards, breeders, then the queen bee etc., among them. Thus, their classes are formed, each with a distinct duty to perform. If each of them meticulously follow their ordained duty, everything will be going on a regular manner. If on the other hand, if all the bees are treated as equal among themselves, presuming any of them can perform any one of the duties specified for each class, will the hive ever exist? Can there be a civilised system and regulations if all are treated as equals in a society? Nature has a clear-cut objective and planned system. That can never be subverted; nor it could be won over; nor anybody can venture to eradicate and abolish the differences that are naturally structured".

Only because, science is making strides against nature in so many ways and doing so many things, we could witness progress in many fields. While the truth is so, why this Professor has sought to talk in the reverse order? I thought in this way: From big dam to atom bomb, from quinine to penicillin, all these were concrete proofs for the history of man who made giant strides against the forces of Nature. While my flow of thought was like this with me. I was listening to what the Professor was telling me.

“Take for instance a big machinery or plant. It has hundreds of parts- nails, screws, nuts and bolts, frames and wheels and axles. If those parts were not made in different sizes and types and if those parts were made uniformly in a stereotype will it be called a machine? Will it work? A big plant or factory or establishment is also like that.

If everybody there are equally placed and are found in uniform disposition, it will not be helpful to produce any result. Only when it is found to have different classes of people like proprietor, worker, Accountant, Watch and Ward, etc. and with so many hierarchical strata, a regularity could be maintained; work will progress; and it will also yield result.” Thus he ended his elaborate explanation.

It seemed that he stopped his statement as though expecting a second fiddling from me, to approve and accept all he had stated. But I had in my mind a very staunch feeling of rejection or a sort of confusion over the veracity of what he had stated; in such a mind-set, I was not in the habit of giving affirmative nods in order to appease the man in front of me. If we start for the first time to utter pretentious lies to satisfy the hearer, it may end up in big failure – this was my apprehension -and therefore I kept quiet.

“What do you say?” he posed a straight question to me.

“I was only thinking over what you have told me” saying so, I wanted to get rid of the intriguing situation.

“If you have any valid reason to counter it, please tell me” Professor told.

“What is there to counter in it?” I said.

“However, you are all present day youths....” He told.

“But your argument is clear and forceful to drive home the message clearly” I said in reply to him.

"Yes. If you happened to see him, you please ask him to come and meet me immediately. He never talks to me nor discusses with me his policies and ideas. If only he speaks with me, I will be able to explain to him with appropriate points and correct him. If he continues to be caught up in such messy affairs he may land himself into trouble unnecessarily. His work is with the City Municipal Corporation. He shall attend to that with sincerity and if he has any spare time he can read for recreation. Instead of that why should he unwarrantedly poke his nose in useless affairs?"

"Was this news about him mentioned to you by the gentleman who came to see you who have just left you?". I asked him.

"He is a very good and perfect gentleman. He won't talk unless he knows it is true and genuine. Should he give him trouble? Even if he bears with that, others who are close to him and are his associates and confidantes will not keep quite. They will vow to settle score with him and may attempt to do away with him. I will take care of other things and talk about, to save him. First let him be immediately sent to me." He spoke thus with great concern and with responsibility.

I took leave of him with much concern and came out of his house.

6

AS soon as I entered my house, my wife told me that Kumaresan had come to see me.

“What was the purpose? Was that anything urgent?” I asked her.

“He simply said that he just came to see you without any particular purpose. Can there be any purpose for him also? You are a ‘sanyasi’ (a saint) even though you are married. He is an unmarried man, a bachelor. That is all the difference between you two; is that it so?” Thus spoke my wife.

I thought that thereafter my questioning will not serve any purpose. I took meals and having felt tired, I lied down to have a nap; I fell fast asleep. When I woke up it was 4 O’clock in the evening. Then, I at once started to go straight to Venkupilai street, Ezhumbar. Kumaresan was not there. But his mother was there. “Where’s he, Amma? I asked her. “How can I know his whereabouts? If only he was married, he would inform about it to his wife and who would know better all about him; and he would also abide by her dictum”. She said. I thought that this was not the appropriate time to have a leisurely dialogue with her and I took leave of her and escaped from there quickly. I also thought that perhaps he might have gone to see the professor at his residence. As it was Sunday, a public holiday, his office would not be functioning; hence, where might he have gone? While I was walking with that thought Victory Hall came up in my mind. Immediately I boarded a bus went straight to High Court, got down there and walked and entered into Victory Hall.

It was an unexpected scene to me. My friend Kumaresan was standing up there and talking with a firm voice while he was knocking at the table. He spoke “This resolution should be put to vote; I am not bothered whether the resolution will be adopted or be turned down. As it is a public Association, it shall take an unbiased stand. Whether it will or not has to be explained to the youth. Some of the members may be officers. But for that reason, if you expected that most of us who are young members should never raise our voice, should be submissive with folded hand, then we would like to show to the president of this Association undoubtedly and assertively who we are” saying so, he again thumbed the table. Those who were seated on either sides and behind him tried to make him sit down by pulling his shirt. Those who were seated on the other side shouted “order,

order” some others called out “let him speak, let him speak” Yet others shouted, “He shall speak, he shall speak”.

One member stood up and called aloud angrily. “This is not a political platform; the members should bear it in mind”. Kumaresan also replied in an agitated mood; “You can read newspaper in the corner of the house; You can talk politics from your courtyard; you can attend political meetings and clap hands there; but, you will resist analysing politics intelligently in this Association; in that case, the Association has no right to exist at all. This shall be immediately wound up, I would like to inform the president of the Association”.

“This ‘Victory Hall’ is not a shop owned by you” one among the members angrily retorted. Again, some of the members tried to make Kumaresan sit down, pulling his shirt. Shouting of “order, order” was heard from one side!

I approached my friend and said; “Don’t be hasty; please sit down! Later we can talk on this”. He rebuked me. “You please keep quiet; If we leave this chance, we will lose it for ever”, Telling me thus assertively, he continued “I would like to insist to put this resolution for voting at once”. Even before I could ask him and ascertain about the resolution, the president announced: “To-day’s meeting has come to an end; the date of the next meeting will be informed later and he rose up from his seat.

Thereafter, a few of the members came to Kumaresan and they began to trade abuses on him; some others tried to put down them and beat them. We can give room for a wordy dual; but we shall not give room for clashes between persons. Hence, myself and another person asked everybody there to disburse and leave the premises. An aged person came near me and told; “A man should always learn to live along with the world with adjustment and compromise. He (Kumaresan) does not know that. He shall not oppose rich people always; he may lose his job and livelihood” Another person told me: “Without any more word please take him away with you and leave this place. Otherwise, confusion may increase and aggravate”. As asked by him, I took my friend by his hand, led him out forcefully and proceeded straight towards the High Court Buildings.

“Lo, what a pity! How worse are these educated men and graduates! Only now I came to know that they are servile. The uneducated-the illiterates-are living as slaves because of their ignorance: But, these educated folks have avaricious intentions to live and lead a comfortable life than others, and for that they just pledge or sell themselves. Instead of promoting an education which only cultivate and nurture vested interests and selfishness,

it will not bring any harm if all the colleges existing at present are closed". Said Kumaresan.

"What my boy! You are talking all and sundry! As you are not a graduate, should you condemn the whole lot of graduates? Why and how were you taken up by hastiness and angry? patience please. Let your blood pressure come down first" I pacified him.

"No no, it won't come down at all. Unless I also join hands with and mingle myself in the crowd of these slaves and begin to protect and promote selfishness, my agitation will not cool down. These people have forgotten to think of a simple logical truth. Alas! *Where the respect for a worker who toils has gone down, there, the value of a man who riots will go up. That will ultimately end up in harming these very same people.* They are unaware of this bare truth; what can we do?" Thus spoke Kumaresan.

"Why at all this happened? What was behind this chaos?" I enquired him.

"During this week a meeting was scheduled to be held, in which the topic for debate was "Economic Equality is our Priority". I myself proposed for such a meeting with the said topic and asked them to arrange for the meeting. As soon as the meeting started they intervened to say that our Association shall not provide a platform for the debate on a political topic. One after another, three members intervened thus. At the outset, by way of introduction, I told them that only party politics should not find place here in our deliberations, but however, politics in general view, can find place in our topic which could be analysed intellectually and reasonably, and then I began to talk. Wantonly seven or eight members intervened and they rose up now and then to interrupt me, and they also, kept talking and thus disrupted peace in the meeting. President also cut short the time allotted to me. There is some plot hatched behind the curtain and it is unbecoming for the Association. Mr.C. said that if politics was taken to be debated, they would do the same. I retorted that the Association was not an individual property belonging to those one or two members. Then the first man who intervened me brought a resolution to forbid topics on politics in the meeting of the Association. When he proposed Mr. K. seconded it. I opposed the resolution. Four or five persons follow suit, and opposed it. When the chairperson came to know that if it was put to vote it would not get acceptance of the house, he wanted to resolve the crisis by saying" Let us have this as general principle for guidance, and let us not insist to put it to vote". Messrs. C. & V and others did not insist on voting. Apprehending

a failure to their resolution they just kept quiet. At that moment, I wanted to seize the opportunity, which seemed favourable to me, and I insisted for a voting which alone would reveal the real position of the Association. This was what happened which resulted in the chaos”.

“Why did you get so angry and hasty over that?” I asked him.

“Why did it happen” you ask? You know Messrs C, V and K all are graduates. They fear the rich people and they put pressure to prevent me from talking about political truths. This is the result of the clandestine efforts taken by somebody who are in the CTF Company” said he.

“How did you know that?” I asked him.

“Yesterday night a big dinner was hosted in the house of one of the persons who holds a responsible position in that Company. These graduates were invited to that dinner and these men had attended that dinner. Whether these men had been bribed with money or not, I don’t know. Whoever would know that? Those in charge of the company had preplanned for this objection with forethought.” He replied.

“They had done this for their self defence”.

“Where had gone the brain and wisdom of these educated fools?”.

“They are aware of the fact that they can sell their brains and lead a prosperous life. Capable men are they”.

“On a comparison, the prostitutes who sell their bodies and earn a livelihood are better than they. Why at all they studied and got a degree?”

“May be for selling at a higher rate than the prostitutes.”

“My blood pressure rises at the thought of these graduates and learned people who lead a life sans conscience, sans principles and sans impartiality.”

“Is it news? Is it not a known fact that these educated and graduate officials only are demeaning the good name of Free- India? Is it not he who demands and obtains bribes in multiples of Lakhs? Even if the Government would find out his wrong doings and punish him, he would engage legal exponents who are sharp-brained attorneys and defend his case. Then, the Government being unable to do anything will leave him. The learned legal luminaries who are defending his case are also graduates and post graduates”.

“That was why, when dictators take up the reign of the country, before they turn their canons against external enemies and aggressors, they

train their guns against these brainy peoples within the country. It is also appropriate in one way. The harassment and horrors caused by thieves, robbers and murderers do occur now and then in front of our eyes and then they vanish. But these harassments and horrors caused by these brainy people do not vanish immediately; they sustain and continue to harm the society for generations together and decay and destroy it. The confusions and chaos prevalent today in the name of religion, caste differences, inequalities and all other troubles are all caused by these cursed brain-prostitutes; is it not so?"

"Of what use will it be by courting enmity with them?" I asked.

"Of course, it may be of no use to grow enmity with them. A fact indeed. We shall create chance; while anticipating it we shall settle scores with them at the opportune moment. The tigers, lions and jackals are cunning with sharp brains; it is of no use to court enmity with them; At the right moment and when the chance is ripe, we shall shoot down and kill them. It is true, of course".

"These tigers and lions are wild animals with a feeling of self respect. Even if you impound them in a cage, they roar against you with dignity and self respect. They await a chance to take vengeance by killing you. But these human tigers and human jackals are not like that! When you accrue wealth, acquire influence and ascend to leadership they just prostrate before you, lick your feet and wag their tails. And therefore, you are simply deceived" so saying I just turned towards Parry's Corner and looked at that direction. There I saw people crowded. I felt that the artist might be present there. I told about him to my friend and I took him there.

We were simply amazed to see the lines being drawn, forgetting the direction of the charcoal as well as the movement of the nimble fingers which were holding it. While he draws, when he first makes a stroke, he never resorts to erase it thereafter for any reason; and this ability of drawing of figures by the artist made my friend to wonder upon. He was simply surprised at the creative ability of the artist which was able to depict even feelings of sorrows in a context with mere black lines by charcoals. I was happy to see my friend's face struck with wonder thus, even forgetting the confusions that was turbulent in Victory Hall. One among the crowd called aloud "Ah, it is Buddha, Buddha!" The artist's hand was drawing very many lines of different depth for some time. Those lines and curves were irregular and without any pattern. Someone witnessing this from behind me was murmuring: "Oh, it is going to depict Buddha" Someone else was about to lean and fall on me as he was stretching his neck from behind me to have a glance at. I was constantly staring at and following the hand of the artist

A dot here a small stroke there, and in this way drawing lines here and there for some seconds. Then, all on a sudden the peaceful face of Buddha was revealed. Yet another man from the onlookers called aloud: "It is Thiruvalluvar, Thiruvallurvar!" The artist never cared to raise his head and look at the person nor answer him. He was going on drawing; within moments, as in the previous occasion, we discerned the figure of "Sage Thiruvalluvar" with beard and moustache to our amazement. "Is this the figure of "Thiruvalluvar" he who had preached to disown whatever things condemned by the world, rather than grow long hairs and beards" or be "Shaven and Shorn"? Thus murmured my friends mouth. "We have now some figure to look at and identify him, about whom so far we do not know anything" I said. Everybody there were very eagerly awaiting to know what next is being drawn by him. Then appeared "Jesus Christ Crucified" and we all very much wondered to look at it. Thereafter, the artist resorted to go to a corner of that place and sit at rest there quietly. The Onlookers in the crowd began to shower coins on the pictures, each of them dropping coins of their mite from a quarter—anna to half-a-rupee. My friend dropped a four anna coin. Some one threw a one rupee note. I just recalled my thoughts the other day when I was at his hut about the ways and means to help him. Then I took out a five rupee note and dropped it. The artist saw the five rupee note. But he didn't see me. All the eyes of persons assembled there turned towards me. I called out my friend and slipped from there with out a word further. After we reached a distance, My friend asked me, "Are you mad after the art? Should you give five rupee? Should you not restrain yourself?".

"I have good reasons for dropping five rupee. I will tell you sometimes after about that. What's your opinion about the greatness of the art?"

"Art is great, of course. But in these days it will not be useful so much" he answered me.

"Why?" I asked him.

He proceeded: "Do you know a type of martial art in which men with long stick in hand waving and revolving it around launch attack and take defence?"

"I have seen such people".

The stick work in that martial art is something good. It is a great skill indeed. It appears as though you can look on the playing of stick which will not tire you nor you feel bored. But, of what use will it be if you learnt it? After the advent of revolver the skill of the stick has no value at all.

Just like that, after the advent of photography and camera art of drawing is also like that; it is of little or no use".

"Is it not a great skill?"

"Of what use will it be? Will it mitigate the sufferings of the life of the Artist?"

"What can we do for that. Poverty is dangerously harmful".

"It is not the poverty alone that causes the sad plight of the artist. In his life, on some occasion his heart must have been wounded from which he has not yet recovered".

"What do you mean?"

"Have you seen his drawings closely?"

"Yes, I have seen"

"Among them, there is a danseuse..."

"Yes"

Has he not depicted so well, the forehead, the bend, gazing of the eyes, hand gesture or 'Mudhra' of the fingers and all that so appropriately?

"Yes"

"But, listen to me, have you seen the legs which are so important for the dance-were they not missing?"

"Yes. Of course. He has not drawn the legs".

"He has also drawn Buddha, but only the bust. Where are the legs?"

"Yes indeed. In none of his drawings the figures are seen with legs. I saw his drawing of his wife, and there also the legs were missing".

"Now you realise it. He has an inclination never to draw the legs in the figures. He must have been a handsome young man. Somehow he has lost his legs. The sufferings had its permanent stamping. It has not subsided".

"Alas! Was it so?"

"That has not stopped there, I think. After he lost his legs and became lame, he should have lost so many other things which were dear to him in his life."

"May be, his profession or career, wealth name and fame..."

"Might be many more things, who knows? Because there is a wound unhealed in his heart, he has no intention to draw legs in any of his drawings."

I praised the sharp-witted thinking of my friend.

"You have had acquaintance with him. You can ask him about this can you?" Said he.

"I shall ask him about this only hereafter".

"You shall ask him at the correct moment after ascertaining about his balanced state of mind. You know artists have a very sensitive mind. If you err a little all will be spoilt".

"Yes indeed".

"If our sensitiveness is like the needle of a balance which weighs fuel woods, the sensitiveness of an artist is like that of a balance which weighs gold. Suppose we see a young lady we may meet her in person, talk to her or perhaps we may return without talking to her. We may never bother about her neglect. But it will not be so in the case of an artist. If he likes a lady, whenever he thinks of her, he will sigh at her thoughts; he will melt down with tears rolling down from his eyes. This is so when he gets angry with her. If we are angry with anybody, we will scold them and abuse them as we please. If we are brutal, perhaps we may beat them too. But when the artist is taken by anger he will be caught up with emotion which will threaten to burst out to destroy in a large scale".

"Even our Professor had spoken about this".

"Have you been there? When?"

"This morning".

"That was why you were not at home when I came there".

"Ah! I've forgotten to tell you! He asked me to tell you to go over there, without fail."

"OK! I am going there straight. What did he tell to you?"

"Arts, senses, the connections between them etc., were the subject of his talk".

"He will explain them beautifully. As you hear them, your knowledge will grow".

"He is a staunch believer of science and its advancement".

"That's good. But he does not accept economic equality. After he returned from U.S. his brain is incapable of finding out truth."

"He does not at all believe in equality".

"That is the point of conflict between me and him".

"He is highly learned; an intellectual!"

"I do agree he is learned, and knowledgable. That is all. But he lacks in performance that is essential for the advancement of the world. I have told you on an earlier occasion, that we can accrue knowledge and the usage from him that could only be achieved by using a library. We can grow our knowledge with his help and advice. That is all. We can not get a life that might be helpful for the progress of the world, from him. Do you know what persons like him were telling us before the country attained independence? They were telling that it would be good, and in the fitness of things to be the subjects or slaves under the rule of British Government. Now the very same people are presiding over the functions like Independence day Flag Hoisting. They give orations lauding our rights and freedom. We should not bother about these people".

"Why he is like that?"

"Only few can performs duties without fear. Few others are there, who could talk fearlessly. Yet another few are there who could conceive good ideas without fear. Only if you have fearlessness in thinking, you can welcome progressive thoughts and ideas. It is impossible for many people. In religion, literature, politics and all other fields, only those people who were bold enough to have radical thinking, have done some thing concrete to the benefit of the world. Take for instance, Gandhiji and Thiru Vi.Ka*. Even though they were aged they could think of new ways and ideas without fear. Though they were old men by their age, they were youths in by their mind. There are certain others who are young by age and body, but they have become very aged and insane as far as their minds are concerned. Our Professor also has become aged in his mind. What can we do?"

"When growth of knowledge is continuous and sustained how the mind will become aged and old?"

* Thiru V. Kalyana Sundaranar alias Thiru Vi.Ka. was a Veteran Tamil Scholar, orator, writer and a pioneer to establish Trade Union in Chennai in the early quarter of 20th century. One among the leaders of Indian Freedom Movement, he belonged to the Gandhian School of Thought.

"Knowledge will generally be used for anything and everything. The man develops his knowledge in the direction where or the field in which his mind wants it to develop, and utilises it in that way. That is why the knowledge of many people is seen never changed in its course. The foremost necessity of the world, here, is the definite change of mind".

"Alright. He asked you to come there. You now board the bus and go straight to Thiruvallikeni."

"You can also accompany me".

"No, not necessary. I have been there with him this forenoon. Why should I go there again? You can go".

"OK. I am going there. I have forgotten to tell you one thing."

"What is it?"

"That artist is not an ordinary man. That is true".

"I have told you so the other day".

"You commented so, in view of his artistic talent. I don't refer that. He was cool and calm, unperturbed about the patrons, whether they drop a quarter-anna or a five rupee note; he treats them alike in not bothering to look at them irrespective of the quantum of munificence from them. It is not an ordinary thing. It has some basis behind it. In these days, when even graduates bend before you with a gleaming mouth for just giving them a dinner, if a poor man sits calm and unperturbed even at the sight of a five rupee note dropped before him it is something unique".

My friend boarded the bus talking to himself and nodding his head. I walked happily with satisfaction that the life of the artist has touched him also.

I took a bus to Amaindhakarai. When I got down there and was walking towards my home I saw ponni and the boy Thoppan coming in front of me. "Amma where have you been, in this place?" I asked her. Hearing my address, she just stared at me and recognised me and said: "Ayya, is it you? Where are you going this side?".

I showed her my house and said: "You see the house there; it is my residence".

"In the nearby street at a construction site I was engaged as a worker for 'brick-breaking'. We are coming from there after work".

"Where have you left your child?"

"I have left the child with Kundhamma."

"Who is that?"

"You have also seen her the other day. The woman whose husband bet her catching hold of her hair".

"Was she, the woman who was bet? Could you not leave this boy there?"

"I have brought him for small time work. I earn of a wage of ten annas; with him at work, I may earn twelve annas".

"Could you not get him admitted in a school?"

"How can I Ayya! We don't even earn enough to have our full meals! Only when all of us earn, something will be available to fill our stomachs! Samy, You will be blessed, I plead you! kindly find out some errand for this boy and place him there to get a monthly wage. He will work hard and earn his livelihood when he comes of age by atleast as a cartman like his father. Now, I have a desire to send the little boy to school who is born to my present husband (artist). The second child will become a good scholar, a man of knowledge like his father". When she revealed this a sort of brightness appeared in her gleeing eyes which showed a sense of proudness.

I came to understand that a new story is hidden in the life - history of the artist and I asked her with wonder and amazement: "Then who exactly was the father of this boy?"

"He was a cartman in Saidapettai. Then he sold away his cart to get rid of his debts, went and worked as a coolly loadsman. One day he was caught under a vehicle in an accident and was dead. Then, afterwards I came to this place, Chettupattu, and joined with him and am leading the life".

As though I have struck up with a treasure, I was listening to her with awe and surprise. Then I commented "This man (artist) is a good man" thus I kindled her to speak more about him.

She continued: "Of course he is good. But when he is caught up with anger he is no longer a man. He will speak cut and right in a rough tone that the hearer would be driven to kill him- self and die".

I thought that flow of angryness would be thus when his artistic mind happened to undergo any suffering. Thinking so I asked her: "Does he beat you?"

“Ayya! He doesn’t beat me. I shall not tell lies. If I tell lies, I will be cursed to lose my eye sight. I told you, when he was angry it would be very much hurting. When he talks further it would be like adding fuel to the fire. Sometime it will strike in me to run away from him. When once he is freed of his anger then he will talk like a child. But only after I came to live with him, I realised happiness in life. When I was living with this boy’s father I could not even take a full meal all days. It must be half or one fourth. On most of the days I remained hungry. This man is not like him. If I don’t have anything to eat, he will also starve with me. His character is something different. If only I have not found him, long back I would have thrown this boy into - well to die and myself also would have breathed my last”.

“He is an artist. A very capable man” I said.

“Yes, That was how another sir in Kilpakkam was telling about him. Ayya!” It is getting late. I shall go to the railway station to receive him and take him home”.

“Yes you shall go”.

When she was leaving me, once again she pleaded with me to find a job for Thoppan.

Thoppan is not the son of the Artist, only for the past five or six years there must be relationship between the two. This was the thought occupying in my uppermost mind as I stepped into my house.

My wife was seated in the doorstep and did not show any sign of getting up to receive me. She commented: “Have you finished all your holiday job that is Sunday duties? Or is there something remaining unfinished, and unattended to?”

“More or less finished” I said.

“Still it is ‘more-or-less’! That means something yet remains to be done? *Adi*, Kanni! (Addressing my daughter Angaiarkanni) Have you not mentioned your that you have doubt in mathematics? See, your daddy has arrived. You clear it by asking him. *Dey Sankara*! You were complaining about your ear pain. You go with your father and get the ear drops applied. *Ennanga*, (an addressing word of endearance and fondness by a wife to a husband) Along with that you get me some pain balm for my headache on the way. Yet another thing, please bring Appalam for night meals for us”.

“In olden days they have defined a good wife like this – she shall give good advice and counselling like a Minister; feed him all physical

pleasures like a prostitute; she shall obey to his orders and be subservient to him like a servant maid” so saying I entered the house past her.

“The olden days’ definitions are right – but, how? In those days, the barn would be full or overflowing with paddy; the school was at arms length – it was just outside the home, in the frontispiece; the garden behind the house was grown with abundant vegetables; above all, there were enough coins, silver and gold to spend at will – saved in old pot. Gone are the olden days; you can’t draw a comparison with today and insist the definition now” saying so, she followed me inside, gave the child in my hands and walked into the kitchen.

ON that night, it was past twelve; I heard a big noise, a sound at high decibels. It was raining heavily, a torrential downpour and was unrelenting too. The whole sky was dark with heavy clouds; it was not possible to identify the directions. Cluster of lightning's from all sides were seen as though to deprive the vision. Rain water was flooding in front and back side of the house. Drizzles from the heavy downpour has also entered the house through possible holes and it has also drenched the bed a little. I opened the window a little and was looking outside. There were neither thunders not stormy winds when it rained; therefore, it appeared as though it would continue for long time before it abated. I saw some people on the streets gathered in groups with bags and boxes and with mats and pillows moving here and there and seeking shelter. A very big flash of lightening in the vast expanse occurred and in that flash light those people saw my head inside the window. "Ayya, you will be blessed a lot! We were displaced by the heavy downpour, and have come here with our family and children! Kindly provide us with some place to rest! Give us shelter: we have lost all our little belongings, as our hutments have been inundated" They cried and pleaded me.

I ran to the front of the house and opened the door at the street side. They all entered inside in a large group. I gave them shelter in the front of the house. As they are almost twenty to thirty members that space was enough only to sit for them. One man told me "Ayya, I am the fruit vendor". "Amma, yesterday morning you bought brinjal from me, didn't you?" said one woman. When she addressed "Amma". I just turned back and looked at the door side of the hall. There I saw my wife without speaking any word. "Blessed we are, at least we were given some space to sit". One woman wailed: "Oh god! What would have happened to my younger sister Muniyamma? She has a baby-at-arms! She could have come along with me" Another woman moaned: "Pachai lives in a hut in front of mine. She is in full term pregnancy. In a day or two she might be confined to lie-in. Wherever she has gone, I don't know! May be in distress without any shelter".

As the womenfolk who have took shelter wailed thus, perhaps, my wife must have melted with mercy and must have had sympathy for them. She silently watched them, turned back and went inside.. "Samy, you shall also get inside, and go to sleep. Blessings to you" one or two persons voiced thus. Then I closed and bolted the Hall door, went inside and lay down.

Should all of them have come only to our house?" said my wife.

"Residents of other houses would not have stirred out of their beds and must have been sleeping" I told her.

"Let them be here, poor folks. Are not they?" told my wife.

I was lying without replying to her. Then all on a sudden, I thought of the hut of the artist in the Chettupattu low lying area. As though shocked, I rose up in the bed and sat down and cried "Ayyo!"

My wife called: "What happened to you? What is that?"

"Nothing. In Chettupattu area, I have a friend who lives in a hut. Ayyo! I don't know what has happened to it!" I answered her.

"What can you do if anything had happened to it? Please be quiet. Lie down and sleep" she told me.

My mind was much distressed to think of the poor artist's family and the family of Kundhamma. That was very much a low -lying area. Therefore, I thought that flood would have inundated, marooned the hutments and entered into them. I imagined that the whole area had been flooded and I was painfully worried about them.

"It seems that you have relations in hutments even! Is it male or female?" My wife asked me.

Her sarcastic speech, instead of bringing down my worry had in fact enhanced it. "Don't talk rubbish! An artist who had drawn pictures on the pathway in China Bazaar. I have told you about him. He is living there in a hut" I told her.

"Is he residing in a slum? A man who can draw pictures! Alright, If ever you would like to go there instantly, you please tell me and then move. I will rise up, get the doors bolted after you left".

Then she turned to the other side in the bed. My mind was much worried thinking over the slum and the hut where the artist resides. I just peeped out of the window. It was raining continuously in a set measure. In fact, I was longing whether there was any way to stop it from raining. I was awake, and was worrying about it for an hour. Somehow I was caught up in sleep and slept deeply. When I woke up it was beginning to dawn. The heavy rain has relented and changed to drizzle. I woke up my wife, asked her to close and bolt the doors, took the umbrella and opened the doors. Many men and some women among those who have gathered and stayed in the front side of our house had now left the place to go and have a look at their

flooded slum. I unfolded the umbrella held it over my head and started to walk.

Along the way I saw water that has logged heavily and looked like a chain of tanks. When I reached the Poovirundhavalli Salai*. I saw the road fully inundated and spilled on both sides. The Pachaiappa's College looked like an island being marooned by flood water on all sides. Large bands of frogs which were in recluse and slumber under stones, bunds and on sides of the wells had happily come out on seeing the arrival of fresh water and were drumming in chorus. The road was seen clean, neat and fresh, without dirt or dust. Likewise, the buildings were also seen, in an appearance neat and clean, after having taken a fresh bathe. Just as people would appear on Pongal Festival Day** in new dresses and wearing happy and jubilant look, the trees on either sides of the road, having been washed off the dirt, looked neat with new and strikingly beautiful look. I walked past Dr. Gurusamy Road, and Nauroaji Road and then reached Pachaiappa's College Hostel Road. There I saw water spreading and flowing in every direction. I did not engage in looking at the vastly spread water-sheet or the inundating floods. Instead, my eyes searched for the water-logged hutments. When I walked a little further, the huts appeared. They were seen like pens of fowl just floating on the water. I saw some three or four persons in hip-deep water and doing some thing. I just stood near the railway-crossing. I walked few steps in the station road. I realised that I could not go near the huts. Just like the poor people from the Amaindhakarai slum who took shelter after midnight at our house, these people also should have gone some where to take shelter and would have stayed there – I thought this way. Others would have gone safely, but, how a lame man would have crossed the deep water that had inundated their slum- this was my worry which perturbed me much and I was shaken at this thought. I was pained with distress as though some thing, unimaginably horrible had occurred. I saw two persons emerging from the side of the slum and approaching towards me slowly. I stopped to hear from them. When they neared me I asked them about what had happened.

They answered me; "Should we be reminded of the horrors to be retold? That man knew swimming. Therefore, he was saved. Ponni took her baby and walked along with us. We took the boy and held him up with us. Alas, pitiable was the lot of that lame man! Half the way he swam; then half the way he caught hold of us and somehow he reached to safety along with us."

* It had been renamed as Periyar E.V. Ramasami Road. It is one of the three major arteries in Chennai City.

** please see the foot note at Page No. 73.

"Where is he?" I asked them.

All of us have gone to take shelter under the roof of that white building. They call it some office...." answered one among them.

Someone else continued to complete the first man; "They call it some tax-or some such thing – office is that."

I understood that it must be the Income-tax office, and immediately rushed there. I sighted there large gathering of women, men and children. Host of the women folk were seen with drenched saris and the men with loin cloths. When the artist saw me, he called me out: "Ayya, Please come, we are here." Even before I could turn around and look at them, Ponni came in front of me with half wet – not fully dried -sari being draped around her and told me; "He is there, please look at him." Her face was pale with fear and gloom. I straight walked to the place where he was. Nearby the child was lying asleep. I cannot read the fear or worry about flood or any such thing in its face. Almost the face of the artist was also like that child's. As they have spent the night awake and wandering in search of shelter, the tiredness of the body was seen a little in the face which appeared a little withered. The boy Thoppan was seen seated under a tree in front of the building; he was viewing everything with a fearful look. I could feel that there was much fear remaining in his heart.

"Why did you come here? Are you having your residence nearby?" the artist asked me.

"I was worried about you and your hutment; I came here to see what had happened to you. Straight from my house first I went there to the slum. Then from there I came here to look at your lot", I told him.

He asked me, "You could have seen flood every where, when you went there. Could you discern the hutments?"

"The upper half of the huts are visible like the fowls' pen. I cannot see the door, entrance etc."

"When water inundated our place, its level quickly raised up to the hip. I have never had this sort of horrible experience. She took the child and gathered all clothes and came out to safety. But I being a lame man, neither I could be helpful to anybody nor I could help myself. It was a harrowing experience even to get out of there. For, half the distance I swam, for the rest of the distance, they gave me helping hand. Ponni was very much worried about me. As a single soul what else she could do! It was

the man – you know him – the husband of Kundhamma, took our boy and carried him on his shoulder; he carefully caught hold of me also, moved us away to safety and he also followed us to make us reach safety. In short, it was he who saved us. It was a new experience to me altogether”, thus narrated the artist.

“Somehow you have escaped from the flood.” I consoled him.

“Is this the only misery in life? It comes in so many unknown routes and forms. This flood is one among them. That’s all.”

“I saw flood everywhere, a vast water sheet spread in all directions.”

“The experience that I had undergone yesterday night, it appeared to have taught me a lesson.”

“What was that?”

“To die is not, that much a hardship; but the real hardship, or suffering is, the threatening posed by the nature as though death would devour us. When the deluge – the great flood – comes and takes us straight to the sea and it drowns us, then we will not at all feel the hardship or misery of death. We could feel the misery or hardship only when we are alive; is it not so? When we don’t feel it and think about it where can be the hardship? Hence, only the feeling and thinking are true hardships” he spoke thus.

I kept my thoughts to myself.

“Ponni” The artist called his wife and said, “We owe him a rupee.” She didn’t speak; she made a sign by her eyes and also she tried to make him infer by putting her finger against her lips, a sign for keeping silent. When she left from there, the artist looked at me and spoke to me in a low voice; “She was afraid that when she untied the knot to take the money everybody who saw it might be, asking for help. When I had money with me, I would certainly distribute it to all and the very next day I would be starving. That was why, when I had money I would give it to her. Only after she came and joined with me I got enough food and I was never allowed to starve. Therefore, It appears to me that what she says is correct.”

“What a good world it is! Rich people also have to safeguard their money in close-up walls and lockers; even ordinary poor people also have to save it under tight knots. Men can not believe each other in the money matter; is it not so?” I told him.

He replied me; "It is well said. Man never believes in another man; and he can't believe in him. In real perspective, due to the harrowing effect of money the husband never believes his wife; and among two friends, they disbelieve each other. Thus money is cheating everybody without exception. The brain of the human beings has not developed to such brilliant extent as to put the forces of money down, by sitting on its head and thrash it to make it obey to human beings."

"Brains of men have already developed and have strengthened, only the mind of the human beings has not yet developed." I told him.

At that moment, a change occurred in his face as though he had recalled something which he had forgotten. He beckoned the boy Thoppan and told him: "Thoppa! Go and fetch your mother here." The boy started to go in search of his mother. He spoke to me in low voice; "Yesterday, one among those who gathered to look at my drawing has dropped a five rupee note. Will it not become useless because of being drenched?" I realised that the value of money as well as the concern over it had not omitted to toss and worry him. Ponni came there at once. "There in the money I gave to you, there was a five rupee note" he told her.

She answered him; "I am as much aware of it, when we came out to safety in the hip deep flood; from then onwards, I was thinking over it."

"How did you got it dried?"

"I was wiping the drenched corner of the note in my face; I have kept it over my face. I put a knot over it in the night itself. In the morning I went to the corner and unknotted it under that tree and found it intact and in good condition" she answered him.

"You did it! You are shrewed!" he appreciated her and sent her away.

Then I told him: "You can come to my home and stay there for two or three days. I have a small shed at the garden in the backyard. You can stay there; you can go back to your hut as soon as the flood is drained."

"Kindly excuse me; we thank you, but, we don't need your help. You have exhibited mercy and kindness towards us; that itself is enough. Everybody have their own typical abode to live at; The mouse has its abode in the burrow; the ant has its abode in the anthill."

"There is no such difference between men, so as to identify them as rat and ant!" I told him.

"Whether there, is any such difference in nature or not; there is difference in 'roofed house' and 'thatched shed'. Let it be so, kindly excuse me. Please don't mistake me. Your kindness alone will be enough for us."

"How long could you stay here? After 10.A.M. Office will start to function here."

"What is there if it is so? What happens to all these men shall also happen to us. We will go wherever these people move to go. More over, we have associated with Kundhamma and her husband very closely and affectionately. If, we alone come there leaving them away here, can we once again live at the same place tomorrow with the same amount of affection?" He asked me.

I told him; "Let them also accompany you and come there."

"No, no. That is not necessary, kindly excuse me. If they will drive us away from this office premises we will certainly come to your house. Not now." As he had told thus finally, I gave up my effort as there was no place further to insist them. In the road, some passer by called out "Mohan", and the artist was startled to here the sound of that name and he turned back to see.

I asked him, "why did you look back?"

"I heard some voice which was so familiar to me" he said. Immediately as though he did not bother about it, he told me; "You know the unexpected hardship which came thus yesterday; but, do you know how happy was Ponni before we went to sleep?"

"Why and how?"

"The amount of money which I received from my patrons was an unexpected one" he told and proceeded in a low-voice "It was thirteen rupees. So much money was received by me only once on an earlier occasion. Next to that only yesterday I received so much amount. On seeing that Ponni was immensely happy. She was all smiles throughout. She looked at me repeatedly with bubbling love and affection. We went to bed with so much pleasure and happiness. We heard loud voice and shouting 'flood, flood'" while in deep sleep, and even before we could wake up and see what is going on, flood had entered into our hut. The mat of the child got drenched. Ponni cried aloud and took the child on her shoulders; she took the boy and me by her hand and she was weeping aloud. We, all the residents of those hutments, started as a large crowd and till we reached here, she was in tears,

weeping all along. To us, these pleasures and pains are like the hot sun, followed by heavy rains with thunder storm during summer season.

"Your harrowing experience is very much fearful even to hear." I told him.

"You know how mercilessly Kundhamma was beaten blue and black by her husband; but, the very same man was full of affection and kindness yesterday night towards us and you shall know how soft he was while helping us," he said.

"Was it so? How is that he was disposed with so much kindness and softness towards you?" I asked him.

"He is just there; he could hear us. Let us move towards that side nearby the tree and we will continue our talk there" saying so, he moved forward. We reached the tree side and sat there.

"He has a special affection towards me. He will not pay heed to anybody else. He will abide by my words only," he told.

"What is the reason for that?" I asked him.

On earlier days, when I reached this place for the first time, I took shelter only at the verandah in front of his house. She is a blessed woman with good virtues knowing that I was hungry she fed me with porridge twice. Then I had moved with them closely. She also moved with me affectionately as my own sister calling me as "Anna" (elder brother). With in a month he fell ill for two weeks, caught up in typhoid. Then there was no means for even to have food. The company where he was working refused to give him even a paise as loan, since, he had already borrowed a heavy amount from the company. Only the money which I gave them saved them from misery out of penury. I also gave them money for medicine too. I was in the habit of not asking back the money given by me. Even if they give, I will not take it back. More over, I too was having a good income. Everyday I would be getting at least six or seven rupees. Every third day I used to go there and draw and get income, which helped them. He is grateful even today, because he was remembering the help rendered by me then. He is not such a bad man."

"Because of deprivation and poverty; he has lost peace of mind."

"Exactly that. That was the reason. Otherwise, he is for more a better man than me. If we could tell all, I am a bad man. I am a traitor; he who committed breach of trust", saying so, he heaved a sigh.

I was bewildered to hear these words from him. "Why do you call yourself so. Are you not helping them even now as far as possible by you?" I asked him.

"I am good now, of course. But, on one day I dared to betray him. That blessed woman saved me".

"What was it?"

"The man was sent on duty by the company to some outstation. I was then drawing with paper and pencil. I then began to draw the picture of Kundhamma. Only after this incidence I gave up drawing with paper and pencil. She possesses a very good physique and structure. Her's is a beautiful body, with appropriate curvaceous bodylines rarely to be seen. I observed the structural form of her body very attentively and preserved well in my heart. As I started drawing her figure her beauty was deeply planted in my mind even more firmly than it was before. Thereafter, my eagerness and desire to see her, speak with her and touch her grew up. This desire rose up in my veins and blood vessels like the intoxication of liquor. The beauty of the figure that I drew up by looking at with my eyes, had thus grown into a sense of intoxication in my body. I could not correct my mind with any amount of morals nor stop it from going astray. On that day it was 10⁰ Clock in the night. After the neighbouring houses and the house opposite have become silent, I just moved towards the place where Kundhamma was sleeping. I placed my hands on the face of Kundhamma.

She woke up crying "Anna" (elder brother). I blurbed like a lunatic. She wept telling me "I prostrate before you, and I pray with. Please don't do it, please don't do". My wits returned to normalcy at once. I returned to my place" he ended his narration.

"Were you not married then?" I asked him.

Only after a passage of two months after that incident, Ponni came into my life. Ponni was eking out a livelihood by doing coolie work. Ponni had already lost her husband. Kundhamma had met Ponni at her work place where Ponni also had come to work. Both had got acquainted with each other. Kundhamma herself had told about me to Ponni, and she brought her to that hut. She also told me about her and made us both live together as husband and wife."

"It was how the mind will tend to err, only a few persons can escape from committing such gross folly."



"That too, for a person like me, who had very deeply involved in an art, it would be very much impossible to live, controlling and regulating the emotions. An elderly man who was getting treatment along with me in the Hospital, had told me this truth. He had in fact told me, that people who had very deeply involved in fine arts like Drawing, Music, Sculpture, etc., would be spoilt by the very same art, having been intoxicated by them with deep desire. That seems very appropriate indeed. I myself had seen in my life. The elderly man had told me often that if only Gandhiji had been trained in arts he could never have led such a disciplined life."

"Who was that elderly gentleman? When did it happen and where? Was it in the Government General Hospital?" I asked him.

"What I was telling about, did not happen recently. It occurred five years back; and that too, in Calcutta".

"Have you been to Calcutta, then?" I questioned him.

He answered in the affirmative.

After these questions and answers, I could find some sort of change in his face. I could not realise, nor find out what it was. Therefore, I stopped questioning him further about that.

After sometime, "You told me that you have been drawing pictures on paper with pencil etc., If they are with you, will you please show them to me? Let me see them."

Again, after keeping quiet without answering me, as though he was pondering over something, he heaved a sigh telling me "there is none with me".

I told him "you will please draw something in paper. I will show it to my friends. If they are in papers you can preserve them for a long time".

He said, "May be, it may last long. But now I am not drawing pictures with pencil on paper. Some pictures already drawn by me on paper were with me. But, I have burnt them all. When I tried to misbehave with Kundhamma, losing good sense and wisdom, acting in a spurt of emotions, and regained wits, from that moment onwards, I did not even touch pencils. Only the piece of charcoal is my drawing material".

When he spoke thus, I could realise the proud feelings of sacrifice from the expressions of his face. I was surprised to think about him. "Can there be any artist who could behave sacrificing like this?" I thought so and heaved a sigh.

After some time I told him "we shall call Kundhamma a woman of great chastity".

"Do you know, that many of these poor people are leading a very virtuous life? Those who look at these poor folks from a distance may not be able to find out these truths" he said.

"If the truth is so, why should they often quarrel between themselves?" I asked him.

"What else they can do? He has no work and no income. Every day they are haunted by sufferings and sorrows because of deprivation. They can not even look at each other with happiness. The woman has delivered a babe which was dead. He post-natal physical condition requires much care- she cannot be neared for quenching the physical desire. If among the hutments of these poor, there is a family living peacefully, then we can very well presume that they have enough food to eat, and they do quench their thirst of physical desire too".

"Ayyo! Pitiable is their lot! They want the barest minimum needs. Even without getting these needs they languish and wither!" I poured my sympathy with them.

"What else could they do? The new born babe delivered by Kundhamma would have been otherwise hale and healthy. When she was carrying the baby she took medicines indiscriminately so that it died as soon as it was born".

"Was it so? Another onslaught in their life." I pitied.

"These horrible occurrences – the child mortalities, are very large in number only in slums. They are hard workers. Their children should be with sound physique. Is it not? But in fact, it is otherwise. Thus they take in medicines indiscriminately and they get their uterus damaged. How can be the children born to such people? It is born with so many maladies and diseases. What else to do, when the poverty fries them? They are very much fearful over conceiving and delivering children. If they conceive they cannot go for work for several months; they will lose wages for several days; if child arrives their hungriness is enhanced, starvation extended, while expenditure is increased. Thus the poor people have started to think about, in these days. Should we mention about others? Ponni should have by this time given birth to three children. One we have got terminated; one is born to us and with us. We are dreaded to think of the conception and arrival of another one."

"Could not the Government give some help to these poor people at least in this regard?" I asked him.

"Some one said that some advertisement is appearing in cinemas in this regard" he answered me.

"Their propaganda is like asking everybody irrespective of rich and poor, to buy a motor car for every family. Are we in need of this kind of propaganda or advice from the government? Every one of us are thinking about that. Whether they properly guide to put that thinking into practice is our question. They simply fritter away the time by story-telling, are not they?" I said.

He kept quiet for sometime and then he started to talk "I am very clear about one thing. There are only two ways to bring forward the poor. One: To abolish the differentiation of classes as rich and poor and bring into existence of the egalitarian society by declaring poverty as a crime. Another one: people in the higher strata in the society shall mix and mingle with the poor and underprivileged; they shall show sympathy and mercy for the poor and try to correct their follies. The first way is like constructing a new house in the place of the old house. The second way is like repairing the old house".

"Are you going to get your hut repaired after the flood has drained?" I asked him.

"What else can we do? To build a new hut we would require a lot of money. There are none who would build a new hut for us. All the walls would have fallen. Everything inside the house would have become slushy mud", he lamented.

When he was speaking thus about the flooded floor of the house and its wall, three or four persons came there and told him "Anna! They ask us to move to that school building, and vacate this place". Everybody was in a haste to collect their clothes, things and mats etc and were ready to start from there. I told the artist that I would come and see them in the evening and took leave of him.

ON that evening, even before I started to move out of the office of the Court, Kumaresan came there in search of me and he stood before me.

"What my friend? Did you meet the Professor? Did he say anything?" I asked him.

"You just leave your files in their place, close and lock your table and come along with me. I will tell you" saying thus, he waited for me.

As soon as we came out I again asked him the same question.

"Yes, I met to him. He spoke to me. He said that I was teaching the workers politics which might jeopardize my job" he told me.

"He only meant your good, didn't he?"

"All right. I never indulge directly in politics. I am imparting them, through my classes, pure knowledge. Was imparting of knowledge, banned? If it was prohibited, would it not amount to suppression? If such good ventures would not find place in our country, the very future of our country would be in danger. We had seen in day-to-day life that the families which were under strict control and oppression had burst to pieces all on a sudden and had gone dissipated to dust. Even a school which had been run under strict control and discipline had all on a sudden lost its balance and had been spoilt. Will oppression be a proper approach for knowledge? Do I nurture enmity? Do I kindle the fire to start any revolution? I just impart to grow knowledge. Is it a crime? You can tie up the hands and legs of a good man and oppress him. Because of that, bad man comes out and indulge in atrocities. Good people do fear about the bad men."

"What exactly did he tell you?"

"He was telling the opposite of whatever I was talking to him".

"Then?"

"He repeatedly accused me, finding fault with me that I was promoting enmity. I never indulge in abusing any particular individual personally; and I was never in the habit of hating anybody. I have made it a policy that we should never hate rich people. They were also subjected to

the pressure of situation; it was only with a view to protect themselves – let us call it as self defence- they accumulate wealth; when everyone of us is guaranteed with good protection from exploitation and poverty they will also leave from their ring of self protection and stride in the path of progress. These have been my words of propaganda every where”.

“To whom?”

“To workers”.

“Where?”

“Near C.T.F. Company, in some colonies and the hutments nearby and around it”.

“You have not told me about this so far”.

“Of what use will it be if I tell you about it? Will you accompany me?” said he, and he straight away took me to the bus bound for Amainthakarai. “I was told that hutments in low-lying areas in your locality had been flooded and marooned; I should go there and visit the places. I would accompany you; we two can talk together during the bus journey and reach there” he told me.

When we sat in the seats I told him: “You have not so far told me about taking classes to the workers. Why was it so?”

“Those who have got married and are living with families will not be useful to these public service- I have a firm belief in this way. Therefore, I did not inform you about this. You will have time enough to give your service to your wife and children only.

I burst into laughter.

“Why do you laugh?”

“Could you not ask a word from my wife about the kind of service that I am giving to my wife and my children?” I asked him.

“Whatever be the amount of service you give to your wife and children, grievance will always be there. Your interest, affection and misconception of devotion in your family have grown so much.”

“Oh! You are lecturing a new kind of philosophy! That is why, it seems, that you are not inclined to marry, and you spend your time like this in conducting classes?” I asked him.

"Yes, that is why I am leading a pure and disinterested life".

"Ah, ah!" I laughed heartily and with a merry scorn. "Then what did he tell you?" I asked him.

He told me with all kindness, "You can follow any policy, and join any political party; but only one day, once in five years, you can do that political service". It was his advice, that if one did the service of casting vote once in five years to the policy or political party he supported it would suffice".

"It would be enough, if you would do as what he said".

"It will be enough if the people have political knowledge. But, in our country 90 percent of the people are illiterate.* When Election comes they are fully ignorant of it and they cast their votes in any of the ballot boxes** in the polling booth following truthfully the advice of some person or other. They will blindly cast their vote simply to those persons who brought them by vehicles or those who gave them a cup of tea. I am teaching these people the required political knowledge. Is it not a good service without any flaws?"

"They just listen to you what you tell them. But are they aware of your policy? Their minds have grown with likes and dislikes towards rich people. Can they remain without disliking the rich people? Will not your speech induce them to do so?" I said.

"Was it a mistake?"

"Yes, had only they not listened to you in your classes and acquired knowledge, would they have become like that?"

"I just talk to them about plain policies to make them aware of it with their true knowledge and understand it; but I never preach them about persons."

"Buddha also spoke such truths. But, are those truths are being celebrated by people? They have made the places where his tooth and ashes were buried as sacred places of worship – as temples- and they celebrate those places very specially. Only those people who are sharp and intelligent with deep knowledge can celebrate the truths and give up the worshipping of

* It refers to the position obtained in 1950s.

** In those days each candidate were allotted with one ballot box. Initially, in 1952 Elections it was in practice. Later, the system of separate ballot box was given up. Common ballot box with ballot paper carrying the name and symbol of all candidates was introduced

forms and figures. For others, even if you teach them about good policies, they will celebrate and worship persons only”.

“For that reason, should I keep quiet doing nothing?”

“Should you not safeguard yourself?”

At that moment, a co-traveller in the bus, who was just seated in the front row, intervened to comment: “In these days when you lose your wealth and comfort and are driven to the edge of deprivation and suffering, neither your brothers – be it elder or younger – nor your nearer kiths - your uncle or nephew - not even your celebrities as close friends and leader would volunteer to help you. Therefore, it is the duty ordained to everybody, that they should protect and guard themselves!” We realised that he had perfectly overheard us from the beginning, and we shifted our topic to something else. We began to talk about the fluctuation of vegetable prices.

When the bus stopped at the Tayler’s Road bus stop we both got down from the bus. I took my friend with me and walked towards the municipal school building. My friend informed me that a week’s holiday has been declared for the school, and the premises was open to those who were displaced by the inundation of flood into the slums and the poor residents of those hutments were sheltered here.

“Oh, these officials are doing so much to these poor folks” I told him.

“You just go and tell a sick man laid up in bed in a hospital that doctor was doing so much help to him, the sick man would at once express his grievance by telling that the doctor could not yet get him cured fully and make him walk. The government is doing a lot of help now to these poor men, I don’t dispute it. But, it had not made them stand on their own legs and walk of their own accord, and lead a life with self- confidence. It had allowed others to eat, revel and enjoy; while it had kept these poor people alone as weak, ill-healthy, and sickly section the society. “That’s my grievance” he explained his stand thus. Again he continued: “Oh what use will it be, when you have given the poor people only the right to vote but deprived them their ‘right to eat’ or in other words refused ‘food security’ to them? It is the duty ordained on the government that it shall provide with employment security to everybody born in the country; it shall give them some job and protect them. It leaves countless citizens to languish with unemployment while it mounts guard upon the vaults of the few privileged. What shall be the use of it?”

"We have just reached the premises. They are sheltered here". I told him. He said: "When I have come here with an intention to see the hutments which were flooded, you are showing the people to me". Saying thus he stopped and stood there.

"What is important to you, whether the hutments which were drowned or the poor people who have been displaced? Instead of merely paying a visit to the flooded hutments and go away, you please hear the grievances of these poor people and go. Will your service of political classes also be like this?" I asked him sarcastically.

"In one way it is also good. Let us first see these people and talk to them; and then next we will go and visit those flooded hutments" saying thus he followed me. As soon as we entered into the school building, the boy Thoppan came and stood in front of us. "Where is your father?" I asked him.

"There he is" he showed me a place under a tree. The artist was lying there.

"Who is this boy?" asked my friend.

"He is the son of that lame artist" I told him.

"Is he also in this crowd?" He asked me.

By this time Thoppan went to the artist and woke him up. He rose up and sat and greeted us "Vanakkam" with folded hands. My friend told me in a low voice: There are some people who will talk on life very interestingly. But, they don't know how to live. His story is also like that! He could draw all that is beautiful, and bring in the senses of aesthetics in his pictures! But he does not know how to live with aesthetically!" and he stopped there.

Artist saw me and spoke with a smile: "We have come here. We don't know how long we might stay here. Who is this gentleman, Ayya?"

"He is my friend. He has seen your drawings".

He said "I too remember I have seen him". Saying thus he looked at the sky. My friend opened his mouth and spoke: "I would have been to this place on some earlier occasion to visit the slums and the hutments. Perhaps you could have seen me then".

"Might be" replied the artist.

"Why can't you dress well, be neat and gentlemanly? If you did

so, you artistic talent will also receive recognition and respect” thus spoke my friend.

“True, indeed. But not necessary” said the artist.

“Even if you are dressed in neatly washed, ironed and spotlessly clean attire, it will look nice” so said my friend. I was simply hearing what he said.

“I am living among poor people. If you don’t look in accordance with the appearance relevant to your surrounding, you will give room for suspicion. You cannot at all live kindly and peacefully” said the artist.

My friend then changed the expression on his face as if he recalled something he had forgotten; he folded his finger and placed it on the lips and then looked at me. Then again he looked at the artist and told: “I presume you have no aversion to lead a gentle and civilised life”.

“Well said indeed. Those who have indulged and involved in arts will always have a liking to wear dresses etc., of high class. Looking always at beautiful things - ‘beauty to look at and think about’ is the way of life for those indulge in arts. They should naturally have a fascination for pomp and luxury. Besides, their physique- the body- is also soft and tender, just as their mind being very soft. **Our Tagore dressed well, elegantly in high class fashion**”. So said the artist.

“Why do you say ‘our Tagore?’ “ I asked the artist.

“Was he not also an artist? That’s why I said that” the artist told these words with his head bent. Then my friend gave me sign with his eyes not to ask him such embarrassing questions. He saw the artist and told: “Therefore, these hard and uneven surfaces and irregular surroundings and a simplicity sans happiness will be harassment and harm to people like you”.

“When there is no other go...”

“Even then the hardship and suffering will be there”.

“When we could show affection and love to our wife and children, we can get accustomed to live like them. When we, of our own volition, would get accustomed to and used to it, where will be the suffering? A thing accepted with liking is happiness. Only the absence of liking is suffering”. Thus answered the artist.

"Why can't you draw good pictures in high quality art papers? If they are sold they will fetch good remuneration".

"For that too, advertisement is required".

"We will arrange to get recognition" told my friend.

"Earlier I had that desire; now I don't have it".

"As far as arts are concerned, they say that the feeling of 'enough' or 'heart's contentment' should not be entertained".

"It is quite true. One has to be like that if one thinks 'art is life'. But, once the good and bad of the art are well understood, thereafter...."

"I am not sure if I understand...."

"Art is also like love. At first, it will go in search of beauty, ability, excellence and all. After getting accustomed to it and realising the truth, the mind will be set to think that it was enough if love and affection alone exist there. At first, I also had great concern for acquiring recognition, name and fame and special attention etc., But what did I achieve with them? Yearning, expectation, exhaustion, disappointment, suffering and all that. Only when I reached the stage of "heart's contentment" with the feeling of "enough" did I attain peace of mind satisfied with the little that had accrued and was available with me" said the artist.

"Will not your enthusiasm grow more when people flock together to praise you?

"Indeed it's a big truth. It is a must for the progress of art. Even when I draw in China Bazaar I don't look at the crowd. But, when I hear them appreciate and when they applaud giving a big hand, my mind rejoices like that of a child. I would then draw more and more and would also draw more beautifully."

"When that is the case, If we could acquire good publicity and name for your drawings, we hope you would then draw with redoubled vigor."

"If we can not earn name and fame through such publicity as expected, then it will bring in exhaustion and weariness in life. Why should we court such nuisance? Now, if I would fall it would be like a fall from the platform in the courtyard. It may not hurt me much. But if I would fall in my ascending while in search of great fame, it would be like a fall from the of the terrace of the house. Bones will get fractured!"

“We shall make an attempt without bothering about the result.”

“Enough of impacts. I need not once again go in for such nuisance.”

“Not now. We will make some arrangement before the next pongal festival, that is the Tamil’s Festival Day. We will arrange for a grand meeting to be held on that day and get you introduced to the gathering. Then you should not refuse to present yourself.”

“I pray you not to make such arrangement. What is available now, and with me is enough.”

“It’s not for you; it is for the sake of the art in you. You shall accept it then without making any fuss.”

“Let us see, then; you would please change our topic for something else.” Said he. Again he himself continued; “There are a lot of artists who go in search of name and fame through publicity and are destroyed in disappointment; I am contented to do my service of making poor and ordinary people feel happy though my art’s display and live without getting destroyed. Would you insist that an art has to be necessarily praised by the privileged and influential people and extolled by the press? The appreciation from the mass of the poor and the common men on the street will be enough for me. That alone will sustain and last long. I do follow the foot steps of Buddha in serving the underprivileged mass. To the endearing common folk I give out my art lavishly. When I first took up the piece of charcoal to draw in the street, my hands shivered; my heart also felt ashamed of. But, now my heart has become numbed. There were days when I would be avidly looking into the faces of the fans who would assemble around me, and would forget the money or income. I was then having great pleasure to the extent that I was even prepared to die out of starvation, provided they amply praise me. I have never had such great pleasure, before I took the piece of charcoal ie. During those days when I was wielding high class colour boxes and brushes in my hand. Now I am contented with my service to the public. Why should I attempt to go up and fall from the terrace and get injured? Instead, I would prepare to fall in the ground, turn around and weep with contentment. Buddha had never been present in big mutts to give his preaching. He was very simple and down to the earth in his approach - he came straight to the people and that too the places where they reside, just as the Christmas carol singers in December – or – the Hindu Bajan Groups who come around in the streets in the early morning of Margasirsha month singing in praise of gods. He spread the truth to the people in person. If my art is useful in this manner, that will suffice for me.”

On that day, I could discern, some unprecedented and inexplicable emotions in his speech. My friend was hearing his words, "standing motionless and still" like a doll in the portrait. I also was surprised to see his lasting patience.

After some time my friend spoke: "We will come again on another day. We take leave of you. We have just come over here to take a look at those hutment's in the marooned slum. "

The artist sent him off without opening his lips and uttering any word. It appeared to me as though he was engaged himself in an effort to control the seething emotions which had burst out of his limits. The face of my friend revealed me that he was deeply engaged in thought. As soon as we came out of the school I asked my friend: "Have you forgotten the mission of your visit here?"

"What's that?" He asked me in turn.

"Have you not come over here to meet the people who were displaced and put to suffering by the floods?"

"Let it be bypassed and gone."

"I think you are satisfied with the speech of the artist. It appears to me, that your political service would also be like this speech, and might stop with that" said I.

"He (the artist) was not a poor man; nor would he have lived in a hut. I could understand it by the manner in which he spoke trend of his speech. He should have had a different life."

"If it was so, what was the reason that he had come to live in a hut and suffer? I was told that, during the yesterday's flood he had to swim the flood, which was hip-deep, to escape out of it!"

"Was it so? It might be correct."

"Why should he suffer like this? Why should he get exposed to the clutches of poverty and languish?"

"It seems that there must be some sort of pleasure in voluntarily accepting the poverty. Had not Buddha and Gandhiji done the same thing?"

"There is, in this world, no excellence equal to freedom from desire.*

* வேண்டாமை அன்ன விழுச்செல்வம் ஈண்டில்லை;
யாண்டும் அஃதொய் தில். (குறள் 363)

"Ah, could you see? Saint Thiruvalluvar has also somehow said this fact!"

"If it is so, let the poor folk languish in huts! why should we try to raise their standard of living?"

"Simplicity gives peace to those whose minds have become cultured and civilised. Even though they have at their disposal all they want to lead a life of renunciation. Will it be in the fit ness of things to impart this (leading a life of renunciation) to the poor? Ours is a tropical country and it has mainly a hot weather throughout the year. Here, we can wander without shirts. Will it be proper to advise the Eskimos in Tundras (Arctic Region) to wander like that?"

I stopped him near the road which leads to the Chettupattu Railway Station and told him: "Look here! The flood that had marooned the huts. See there! the huts which appear like fowl-pens!"

Only then, my friend stopped his deep thinking, and sent his eyes to look at them. "Ayyo! What a great calamity! They were displaced in the pitch-dark of midnight and had moved away from the huts in hip-deep water and had come to their safety!" he lamented.

"What sort of hardships would they have suffered! What kind of things would they have lost!"

"They couldn't have had things; that's in one way a great boon in their life. They don't have the means to save; and hence, they don't have any cause to worry."

"Had only the artist not learnt the art of summing...."

"Some body would have picked him up to safety."

"Would have done that. These poor men, would come to one's rescue in dangerous occasions."

"It is great loss to them, we should say, considering their status."

"The thatched roof is intact. As soon as the flood will drain they will return to occupy their places. But all are of mud walls; almost they would have fallen and reduced to slush."

"Yes, yes. That itself will be very expensive for them to replace. It would also amount to great much of labour and hardship inflicted."

“See water has logged till that end. It’s what they tell ‘water, water everywhere!’ wide expanse of water In one way, it also looks beautiful.”

“Beautiful, it is. But, should we like it? Is it right? It is dreadful and horrible which had inflicted sufferings on a lot of people though there is a form of the beauty of nature in it. We shall tell that the modern civilisation of the present period is also like that! It has destroyed hundreds of thousands of families and thrown them to the dust; while it has paved way for a select few people of the privileged class to achieve a high standard of living! Small houses or tenements at economic cost – say about four hundred or five hundred rupees could be built with brick and cement mortar. Some tens of thousands of such house shall be built and they may be rented out at nominal and subsidised rates to these poor people. But the money is not spent that way. They build houses at the cost of fifty thousand to one lakhs or two lakhs per house; they build fifty or sixty such houses in this way which are two storied or three storied in a luxurious manner; they name that new township after Buddha or Jesus Christ, and call it Buddha Nagar or Christ Nagar. This will appease the taste and likings of those who rule the land, appealing to their eyes as well as brains, by way of aesthetics and satisfaction. It doesn’t stop there; it will also give room for publicity to trumpet that the city had improved a lot. Besides, when foreign dignitaries visit the city, they can use it by showing these urban agglomerations to them and raise the creditable name of this country. Who bother if whatever happen to the hutments of the common people? The govt. says that it suffers with paucity of funds when it comes to providing shelter for the people who languish and lament without out any roof over them to stay wonder. But, ironically, it has enormous funds at its disposal to allocate as loans to provide for the construction of big bangalows to fairly rich people. They justify it as a cause for beautification of the city! What type of beauty is it? A beauty built on the sufferings of, and the destruction of so many people! This beauty is not that of a ‘basil plant’ which is adorning and being adored either inside the courtyard of the house or at the garden in the backyard! But it is the ‘basil plant’ which has grown upon and sends its odour from the place where a dead body was buried.”

I started to think which of these two men’s speeches were full of emotions – whether the speech of my friend now, or that of the artist earlier. Thinking this way, I took my friend along with me and walked towards the Poovirundhavalli Road.

ON the next day as soon as I left my office, my legs took me towards the Parry's Corner. I just paused a while thinking why should I walk thus aimlessly. I saw a man seated in front of the Co-operative Hand loom Weavers, Society Show Room with multicolour pictures drawn by hand. I just went near him and looked at them. All the pictures appeared beautiful. Many of those pictures were hand drawn natural scenes. Some of them depicted the scenes with sun-set; some were the scenes depicting the rising sun from the sea in the dawn some were the scenes of the twilight sky sans the sun; some were the scenes of third phase of waxing moon or crescent just smiling amidst the clouds; some were the scenes of full moon rising from the vast and lengthy ocean and showering milky light on the beach; some were the pictures depicting scenes of moon rising above mountains; some were pictures of scenery which depicted monkeys that jump from one tree to another and play happily in the dense forest; one was the picture in which a curled snake was sleeping in a bush; some of them were the scenes from woodlands where deer's and rabbits were joyfully playing; some were the scenes which depict bunches of interwoven lightnings in the sky that appeared continuously like an embroidery works, even while it was dark and it rained torrentially; some of them were the scenarios of Kutrallam Falls; some were the scenes of Kodikanal lake and surroundings; some of them were scenes of multicoloured flower gardens; some were depicting the rise and fall of ebb tides on the seashore; some were the scenes of the pristine pure water gushing out of the aquifer and running in the stream; some were the attractive and beautiful peacocks dancing with gaiety; few were the scene in which school of crows were being scornfully laughed at by group of parrots; some of them were depicting the love scene of doves; some were depicting the motherly affection of the weaver birds. Thus, there were a lot of pictures drawn in the white papers with rich colours that were displayed at his side. Among them there were also some pictures of beautiful women; few others were the pictures of attractive children with sweet smiles, innocent crying, and toddling. My eyes were looking at them alternately. Some persons came near like me, and peeped at them; others took up them to have look at them. Among them, four or five persons gave money and bought them and left the place. I also had a desire to buy at least a few of them.

I thought about the lame artist. I also thought that how many artists like him are living in the nooks and corners of this world. Further,

I thought that how these people are drawing still, untiringly and unmindful of the neglect of this world. I thought about the artist drawing pictures with the piece of charcoal. I wondered how the artists have drawn these pictures with beautiful colours. However, I could not derive the same amount of pleasure as I derived from the drawings of charcoal. When the art takes birth and takes form, it does give us pleasure coupled with some sort of amazement. Once it has taken definite form, the amount of pleasure will lessen as the amazement is now gone. The pleasure you derive from the toddling of a child will not be derived from looking at its walking firmly after it has learnt the art of walking. The amount of pleasure you derive while looking at the seed sown by you sprouting and growing into a plant, will not be available when you look at it after it has grown up as a big tree. The same amount of pleasure which you derive at the sight of a weaver when he weaves at the loom, can not be derived from seeing the heaps of multi colour sarees in rows in the cloth stores. Thus, I began to think a lot associated to it and pacified my mind.

I noticed the persons who bought and took away the pictures. I also listened how they were bargaining while they buy. The man who was selling those pictures was selling them at the rate of four annas per picture and nine pictures per two rupees. He was repeating these price rates to who ever may ask for it, and he repeated any number of times. Among there was only one person, who repeatedly requested him to give those pictures at the rate of five per rupee. He also promised him to buy twenty five pictures for five rupees, if given at the rate quoted by him. The seller was firm and inflexible and he told that the prices were fixed. Even thereafter, that particular man did not move away. He chose some twenty five pictures and offered to give him five rupees.

“Ayya! It comes to five- and – three quarter rupees. Okay! Let us compromise, please give me five – and – a half rupees. I cannot reduce even a quarter anna further.” “ Said the seller.

At last the purchaser gave him five – and – a – half rupees. He wanted to close the transaction with an advice thus: “In business you shall not be so obstinate and rigid like this. If you will relent and be flexible, you will have a good business.”

The seller in his turn told him: “This is how our people are bargaining to the last, without giving in. I travel from place to place, and have personally experienced in hearing their bargain. Last week I have been to kodaikanal. Europeans bought very many number of pictures from me. Each of them bought twenty to thirty pictures from me. Not even one among them asked me even to reduce an anna from the price. If you reduce it for one person and

if your don't do it for another, will there be any honesty and integrity in business? Tell me."

"You can reduce it in an equitable manner; treat every body alike in reducing the price. Compromising in business will surely benefit both "him that gives and him that takes." We both will be benefited alike." Said he.

"Why sir! You please think it over seriously – will there be a flow of many in this? What is the price of paper? What is the cost of colours? Payment of advance to artists and sundry expenses are there. After meting out all these expenditure what will be the share of cost to be paid as wages for those exert themselves to sell them?" thus asked the seller.

"Will they not get an anna per picture as wages?" commenting like this the famous bargainer just moved away along with the pictures he has bought.

"After meeting out all the expenses and over head cost if a "quarter-anna" is available that will be adequate" saying so the seller of the pictures looked at me.

"Only that much you'll get, you say?" I enquired.

"Ayyo! Major amount is spent by way of payment of advance to them. It is a great nuisance to get work from these artists who are drawing pictures. You can as well be a herdsman taking the cattle to the grazing field. If you ask them to finish the picture urgently with in a stipulated time you won't get it. They will be angry saying that the rate of charges fixed is inadequate. After wards they will trade abusive words upon you indiscriminately. If you decide hell with them and drive them away without any work order, your cannot tolerate their sufferings before you very eyes, in hungry and deprivation. Then you will lament; "Oh, these poor people are a pitiable lot! " and sympathise with them. When they wither in hungry and you show them compassion and give some money to get rice and feed themselves, latter, even if you call them a thousand times they will not turn up. They will speak thanklessly about you, in spite of you haring paid them lavishly in thousands. "He thus indulged to lecture about their typical qualities at length.

I thought that a comparison of the picture presented by him about the artists in general, and the quiet disposition of an artist whom I have met in person and have come to know about personally, gives out vast differences between these two. I asked him: "Why it was so?"

"He said: "You are completely unaware of the mundane world"

"How much you pay as charges for drawing per picture?"

"Two annas."

"How many pictures he might be able to draw in a day?"

"Perhaps he may be able to produce ten in a day. Sometimes he will stop drawing about two or three. **Lazy people!** They will not be bent to sit steadfastly and attend to their work. If only they are steadfast in their work, they will be able to produce even fifteen to sixteen pictures and obtain **wages** of two rupees."

The words uttered by him – "**wages**" ignorant of the greatness of art, "**lazy people**" utterly ignorant of the importance of artists – have very much hurt my heart. To them the world of art also appears as though it is that of the factory and business. **I was pained and disgusted to think that a man who shall sell fuel wood have come to sell pictures and have demeaned the value of art.**

"What amount of imagination, emotion and effort are needed while exerting to draw a picture! What is art? Is it wood-cutting? Those who were well aware of the value and greatness of art had sanctioned large grants to artists. They had given them lavishly in hundreds." I said thus to the seller.

"That had happened in the by gone era, sir! Alright, will you give out a five rupee to get a picture? Let me see. Have not you witnessed how that man was giving me trouble in bargaining for just to get a rebate of four annas, for more than half – an – hour!"

"Even now there are such munificent people who know the value of art and give a lot. I am a poor man. I have no means to give like that. Otherwise, I will give them more."

"In such case, only two or three among them will be lucky enough to be favoured by fortune. Only they will get hundred or two hundred. Others cannot even go for begging for a livelihood. You shall call it a good deed of charity by me that I sell the pictures and patronize them. Only because of me their family could come half way through their hungryness and have-a –meal–a–day," thus said he.

I was reminded of the words of the lame artist. I was amazed to hear the very same idea expressed in the words of artist coming through this seller of the pictures. That art would sacrifice many number of artist and would only protect and give life to few. I thought that there won't be any use in talking to him further; it must be the curse of the day and I gave up

arguing with him further. I wanted to select a few drawing and tried but in vain; I was confused when it came to choosing.

“You yourself select a few good drawings, as I cannot differentiate between the good and ordinary.” I requested him.

“How many?”

“Nine of them.”

“Well said of your munificence! Sir, you yourself calculate for a remission of four annas as well as addition of one more quantify, and hence you pick up nine of them! Thus, it is proved that value of money is greater than that of art!”

I was ashamed to hear what he told. I asked within myself how can the order of the day exonerate me! I didn't answer him. He gave me nine drawings. I gave him two rupees and walked away. When the bus bound for Thiruvallikeni was sighted stet my eyes, my mind induced me to go to the professor's residence. I went near the bus stop and boarded the bus.

A Co-passenger seated along with me stretched his hand to get it asking me “can I have a look at them?” I gave the pictures to him. He unrolled them and looked at them. He picked them up one by one and looked them. He again rolled them back and gave them to me. He told me:” These are mere reproduction-direct copying – of one master drawing which was originally drawn and they are being sold to make money. Whoever must be the author of the original idea and imagination! Some one replicates them! Somebody takes it to sell them and make money! There is nothing new in them - Instead of it they can just print them and reproduce and sell them!”

“Can it be reproduced in printing with the same quality?”

“It could be reproduced better, and still glossy and richer!” Said he. Sounds strange! Every body has their own comments which are typically different from each other. I thought of what will be in store with the professor when these are presented to him for his comments, and proceeded to meet him.

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I got down from the bus and went straight to his house. As usual, while I was climbing up the stairs I heard the voice of the professor "welcome, Thiruvengatam!" I greeted him with reverence: "Good evening, Sir!"

As soon as I entered the hall and took my seat I said: "Kumaresan would have come and met you, Sir".

"He came and met me. I told him what I wanted to tell him".

"What did he say?"

"Why he is so adamant and firm! You are also in his age group. But you are not so obstinate. He speaks as though he will even give up his life for principle. After all, what is principle? Shall not the principle undergo changes according to the growth of knowledge?"

"Of course, he is firm and obstinate; but he is also sincere and truthful".

"That is the trouble with him; he is unchangeable because of that".

"What did he say last?"

"He? He poses a lot of questions even to me".

"Is it so?"

"But all of them are rational and reasonable. They are appreciable, really. He is possessing a very keen knowledge. Howsoever it may, - even if we have the sound truth to substantiate on our side - we shall not be angry and hasty. We shall keep patience. We must certainly keep patience. **You cannot change the world overnight. It will change only on a phased manner. How many centuries have gone before we could get the people's, Democracy and Republic System of Governance! What amount of development of civilization was needed before we could reach a stage where universal adult franchise was made possible! How long a time had passed!**"

"What were the questions he asked?"

"He asks of what use will it be if we keep the people at a state where we deprive them the 'right to eat' but sanction them with 'the right to vote' alone. He also asks shall we talk about equal rights and equality in

temples etc while in market places and other places we measure the value of man by money. He also asks why we make tall claims as to the following of the western countries in many spheres whereas we don't try to follow good things obtaining there. Further, he underscores that it is the duty of the government, to provide the unemployed youth with employment. He asks whether we shall not follow the footsteps of the western countries in providing with subsistence allowance for the unemployed youths like those western countries, at least to allow them to have-a-meal-a-day. Oh, he is dangerously troublesome!"

"What did you tell him?"

"I gave him apt reasons. But, were they admissible in his case? No; he was stubborn in his stand, unrelenting."

"At last".

"I have advised him sufficiently. He will not go against them, I hope".

"He told me that he was merely conducting classes. He claimed that he did nothing other than that. He never scolded, not abused nor did he court hatred with anybody".

"That too, why should he do? Why should workers learn political knowledge? Still they are wanting of literacy. Then, how could they pay heed to lessons in politics? His efforts are infructuous. Could they learn whatever he taught them in the class and understand them in their totality? Supposing he teaches them one thing which is mistakenly understood as something else, and they behave in an arrogant and uncontrollable manner, who will have to bear the resultant ill-effects? Will it not fall on him? It will not end up with that. Perhaps, it may bring harm even to his life! We shall not leave him in his path as such. Whenever you happen to see him you please advise him. Only when we repeatedly advise him he will correct himself" said the professor.

While he was talking to me thus, a plate with fruit juice, another plate with Halwa and other candiments, and yet another plate with fried cashewnut kernels came to us. He looked at them as he stopped talking and asked me to take them. He called the servant and ordered him: "bring us coffee also".

I began to take cashewnut kernels. He looked at the roll of pictures and asked me: "What's that?"

I answered him "Drawings"

"What sort of drawings?"

"Natural sceneries etc."

"Are these pictures hand-drawn?"

I said, "Yes".

At once, he burst into a scornful laughter and asked. "Are you also having this craziness?"

"They were beautiful; also they were cheap".

"How"?

"Nine of them at two rupees."

"Was it so?" then he kept silence.

As it appeared to me that I should show it to them I just stretched the roll and gave the pictures in his hand.

"Not a loss to the money invested. However, what amount of human effort and human power is being wasted! Because, one has to sit down patiently and draw line by line and paint colour after colour! Why should we indulge in doing what an ordinary machine will do effortlessly! Is it not just like spinning and weaving manually! Obsolete process, dating back to seventeenth century!" so said professor.

"The persons who are engaged in these drawings are those who, when deprived of this job, will have to starve. Should they starve unto death before they could avail a chance to shift their avocation to something else?"

"Howsoever, the reasoning be, it is a crime. Because there are men who have no other work to do, will they be allowed to carry a "palanquin"* nowadays in the midst of the street? Or, will a man who cannot find a job and get wages (Cooli) be allowed to draw a horse-drawn-cart instead of the horse?"

I wanted to skip the subject; unwilling to reopen a matter of arguments, I asked him: "Are these pictures looking beautiful to your eyes?"

* 'Pallakku' a Tamil word has been taken into English as "Palanquin", which, means a carrying vehicle with luxurious seats and curtains, which has no wheel, kings, princes and nobles had these carry vehicles in olden days which was catually carried by men on shoulders.

He once again unfolded the roll and displayed the pictures close to his eyes and said: "Not bad".

Then, the professor's wife who was at the next room some how happened to get a glance of the pictures and she came straight to us.

"Vanakkam, Amma" (Good evening Madam) I greeted.

She reciprocated and said: "Vanakkam. Hope, you are doing well". Then she stretched her hand to have a look at the pictures which were in her husband's hand.

He looked at her and smiled to say: "Oh! you are also willing to have a look at these, Please have it".

She took them from him and went to sit in another sofa and began to stretch them out and look at them one by one. When she looked at them expressions of liking and disliking appeared in her face alternatively. I thought that this lady appeared to possess a first hand knowledge of the art of drawing.

"Do you feel they are good, Madam?" I asked her.

"Some among these are good drawings". She said.

When she was seeing them one after another and after five or six pictures were seen thus, she looked at one picture when I heard a heave of sigh from her. There was also a sudden change in her face. I just presumed it for her dislike, and asked her "Madam, are they not upto the mark?"

She answered, "No, no, nothing like that". So saying she looked at the next one. When she had almost completed all, she rolled them back, and without a word of comment went inside. Professor, who was reading a newspaper then, put it down to ask me: "Then, what next? Any news?"

"Nothing sir," I answered.

"Are these pictures getting a good price?"

"Somehow, they are picked up for a price".

"Yes, it can be like that only. If they draw the nude figure of a woman, and sell it as pictures, you can be sure that every day thousands of such pictures will be sold. Whether they have not yet learnt such business trick, or whether they are hesitant to bring them into market afraid of the long hands of the police and the law, I don't know"

"Can the hands of the law seize them?"

"If they introduce it in the name of art they cannot be prevented; but, if they bring it in the name of trade, it seems that could be prevented."

"If it is done in the name of art, you mean it is not a crime?"

"It is not like that. There is a theory in philosophy. You cannot totally erase or suppress the feelings of man. If you destroy the feelings and emotions of man, he will become a very dangerous machine. If you suppress them, they will wait to take revenge upon you, and do much harm to you. Therefore, if emotions are harnessed in good directions, if they are cultured and civilised; if they are regulated and reformed and uniformly developed, life will prosper well. Your emotions could well be civilised, reformed and regulated uniformly through fine arts like Poetry, Music and Legend (discourses and stories) etc.; If you could do so, it will be well and good for the body; more than that, it will do immense good for the development of the mind. An ordinary man (human being) is greater and superior than a beast; in the same manner, a cultured and civilized man with uniformly developed senses is far greater and superior than an ordinary man.* That was why, with an intention for the emancipation of ordinary man, even devotional songs were patterned to bear love theme in art form; and they were used in bringing good for the common people."

"Do you think that such good is present in the art too?"

It is present in a minute and subtle manner. That's what I wanted to say. Desire for lust is very basic thing in human life. That was homogeneously blended with fine arts; and in order to reform and regulate and make it uniformly develop they used the fine arts such as drawing, sculpture and dance etc.

They also tried their hand to do the same with Drama, (Discourses) poetry and music. Nude figures in drawings and sculptures were present everywhere throughout the world at all times. The reason for that is stated by me earlier.

"Will the emotions and feelings come down because of that?"

"No botheration even if it won't come down. It is enough if it does not increase. We shall tell that this attempt has ended in failure. Nude figure of the woman, has been drawn innumerable times; has been

* A parallel is available in Thirukkural which is reproduced below:

விவங்குகொடு மக்கள் அணையர் இவங்குநூல்

கற்றாரோடு ஏனை யவர். (Chapter 41 · Couplet 10)

"As beasts by the side of men, so are other men by the side of those who are learned in celebrated works"

Translation: By Drew & Lazarus

sculptured innumerable times. But, neither the artists, nor the viewers have corrected themselves. Even in the performing art, that is Dance, little by little they have increasingly reduced the dresses so that chances to see the uncovered parts of the body of the woman that was exposed to viewers was increased; Neither the desire for exposure by the artists, not the desire for lust by the viewers were reformed or disciplined. The artists are increasingly going from bad to worse. On some times, when we introspect, I fear it appears as though the natural thirst for lust has been made to increase by these activities”.

“May be so” I nodded my head in acceptance. It appeared to my mind also to be true. I recalled the incidence recited by the lame artist in which he tried to misbehave with Kunthamma on a night. “What shall be the means to make them disciplined and protect them from going astray?”

“The body is the cause for the development of the brain; and the brain is the cause to produce thinking. These thinkings are cause for effecting changes in the blood circulation etc. Therefore, perhaps the body or the physical condition – may make changes in the mind; or some times the mind may effect changes in the body. Generally the influence of the body over the mind is more. That shall get reduced. The mind shall have more influence and control over the body. Then incidents leading to such harmful effects will have no place at all.” He said. He further added: **“For that was why, didactic literature had been written; moral and ethical code of conducts were laid down.”**

At that moment the lady came out from inside and asked me: “where did you buy them?”

“At a place opposite the High Court. There is an artist who used to draw pictures; and, I with an intention to see him went there. But, he wasn’t there. Instead, some other man was selling these pictures there” I said.

Before I could end my sentence, that lady without even looking back, turned away and entered into the next room. I just thought of the description about this lady given by Kumaresan to me; he has told me that she was well-read, cultured and civilised. I wondered and felt sorry about the lady’s quixotic disposition; all on a sudden she comes in, asks something, and then goes back to her chambers and remains secluded without coming before the audience; These are not at all cultured and civilised habits, I thought painfully.

“Have you seen these pictures? Hutment’s floating on the flood” saying thus professor gave me a page of the daily to be seen.

"Why should I see the pictures? I have personally seen the real scene with my own eyes" saying so, I narrated the incidents about the people who came to my house after a terrential downpour after midnight seeking shelter; about those people living in the Chettupattu low-lying slum area who had waded through hip-deep flood to reach safty.

After hearing my narration completely professor said: "It seems that they have declared holidays to Corporation schools and they have arranged to get these displaced people temporarily stay at those schools".

I said "Yes".

He sighed a little and told: "These people are ignorant of utilising the science".

"What has to be done for this? You will tell that the pits should be levelled; cement buildings shall be constructed by them. Where will these poor people go for resources?"

"Not at all that. You look at the picture; large number of children are seen, closely huddled. If only they had resorted to birth control, the natural increase of the families would have been curtailed. Then, there won't be the trouble to construct thatched huts in the place of houses which are limited and unavailable; further, there won't be any emergency driving them out of the hut in cases of floods; last of all, it won't bring any contingency for closure of schools."

"Why this professor looks into everything in reverse order" I thought within myself painfully. Then I said: "Do these poor folks deny to accept birth control?. Not at all! They are unaware of the appropriate methods for family planning; they commit mistakes and also get their health spoilt. The Government is not extending them any kind of help."*

"What? Have you also learnt to raise the finger against government, for anything and everything?

"Should I have to learn it specially? I spoke what has occurred in mind. Does not the govt. undertake vaccination against small pox at enormous cost? Why can't they spend a small amount for this cause?"

"Small pox is a dangerous disease".

* It took nearly a decade after the publication of this novel, when the family planning programme gathered momentum. During the period relevant to the story, education and awareness had not yet started. Hence, the author had aptly touched a pining problem of those days.

"That was not the exact reason. Small pox is contagious; it will spread to all around; it will also affect the rich people, it being contagious. Therefore, government is spending in order to prevent the contagious disease from affecting the rich. If the poor people's families increase naturally, it would not bring harm to the rich; rather it would also bring benefit."

"What benefit?"

Coolie workers would be available in large number. There will be competition among them. Their wages can be brought down."

"What is it! Your brain has also grown across like your friend Kumaresan! Your close association with him has spoilt you!" said professor.

Otherwise, should not the Govt. set up at least one centre in every district for attending to the birth control for the benefit of poor? Rich people need no motivator; they approach the doctors and get the benefit. What these poor people can do?"

"Poor people are thinking that it is a crime and a sin even to talk about this with the doctors. They do not believe in the advancement of science. Whatever arrangements are made, will they go and get the benefit through such arrangements? Tell me. Large number of people in America are getting benefited by this method. I myself have seen it personally and have analysed about its benefit."

"Poor people now, are not like what they were in early days. Poor people have got the desire that somehow or other they should live, lead a good life, without hunger." I said.

"Whatever may it be, I don't believe in it".

I stopped talking on the subject with that and I shifted our topic of discussion to education; I asked him why the advancement in the examination reformation in the universities in U.S.A have not yet come to India.

"Sooner it may happen in here" he said. I talked on one or two more subjects following that, and then I returned home.

AFTER two days I went to see the artist in the evening. I took with me the picture rolls also. I took it with the feeling that he might be desirous of looking at them, and if he did so, he would also feel glad. When I saw him and was talking to him Ponni came there and stretched two eight annas before me. "You seem to be more particular than him in disposing dues; You are very particular and very strict to clear your borrowings?" I said.

"He, in fact was angry with me, that I had failed to clear our borrowings the other day itself," said she.

"What for are the borrowings? If we give back the money honestly to-day, we can once again borrow it to-morrow, if necessity arises." Said the artist.

"You will have to build the walls of your hut; thinking that you may need it for some expenses, I have brought money to give it to you." I said.

"No, not necessary. I have been to Parry's Corner yesterday, and I have drawn pictures said he. Then he paused for a minute, looked around cautiously once, and told: "I earned four rupees."

"According to your principle, I thought that you won't be going there for a few days. Otherwise, I would have come there to see you."

"Usually I won't go. In Kundhamma's family they are starving without even a meal for a day. He has no job to attend to. How can we remain a silent spectator and see them starving? If we had been in those huts we would be in our hut, and they would be in theirs. Then we won't be seeing each other and we will remain so. But, here, when we have taken shelter under a tree, can we bear it to have our meals alone while they sit in front of us hungry?"

"True, indeed. When will you be going back to your huts?"

"It is told that three fourth of the water has drained out. The hutments are said to be with slushy mud. They say that if two days passed with good sun shine everything will be all right."

"Have you not gone there to see?"

"Ponni went there and brought the mud pots and other utensils here. I did not go there till now. I have been sitting with an idea to go over there. By that time you have arrived at."

"I will also accompany you; let us go over there please."

"Wait, we shall go. What is that roll in your hand? It looks like paintings?. Is it?"

"Yes. It contains paintings."

"Where have you got them? Have you bought them? Let me see."

I stretched my hand to give it to him, while I told him the price etc.

"Four annas per item? Nine items for two rupees? So cheap it is that it is being vended like snake gourd and pumkin! Price not affordable for the artist even to meet his drawing expenses" commenting thus he began to have a close look at it.

He cannot do it very fast as myself and the professor did it while we perused. As though he has found out the flaws and worthiness, he looked at them very closely while expressing his feelings of likes and dislikes and pleasures and pains arriving out of it.

I just turned back to see what did Ponni do. She was seen under the big tree where she was kindling the ashes from the oven using fuel wood for cooking. Near by she has placed pieces of charcoal neatly and uniformly, which could be held with fingers like a piece of chalk. Out of ashes she took too more lengthy pieces of charcoal, took them before her mouth, blew off the ashes around them and placed them along with other pieces of charcoal. **"Basic and raw material for the art of drawing is being produced"** I thought painfully while I looked at them with frustration.

The artist was perusing the pictures with so much care and adulation. He has no mind to leave them or place them down; he kept those already seen by him on his thighs; he placed other pictures upon them. While he picked them I saw that he did so with both his Hands with so much care and endearance. His hands, which took care that, those pictures should not be disformed, folded nor torn, had also ventured to hold out piece of charcoal and had come forward to draw pictures on uneven surface of the ground—I thought about it a while. His mind was fully aware of the precious value of the art. Therefore, his fingers took great care to hold the pictures with out doing any harm to them. He was looking at each of those pictures very closely. If I happen to see a new building in person, I will come around it once, and then go and have a look at its outward appearance from a

distance and will pass my comment that the building is good. But if the same building is seen by a man who knows civil construction, he will go to the nook and corner of the building; he will inspect the windows, window-panes and bars, doors, beams, concrete blend, and the cement pasting etc; he will have a very close look at each of them for a long time and assess and evaluate the construction and structure. Is it not? It was exactly like that, the experience and expressions of the artist with the drawings. When he took up and held out after unrolling the last of the picture in his hand, his face expressed some emptiness akin to that of a man who had lost something so close to him. He did not open his mouth. I also kept silent thinking that I should ask about it afterwards. He did not look at it for a long time, but he rolled it back as such.

“How are these pictures?” I asked him.

“Generally, they are good pictures. There are also few flaws to be seen. Those flaws are only known to us. However, on a general assessment they fare good.”

“Is not the price paid very low?”

“There is no relevance at all between the price paid by you and the value of these pictures. Any amount of higher value may be paid. Is there any fixed value for art? Among them the picture with the crescent – third phase of waxing moon – is excellent! Marvelous indeed! The picture with four crows seated on a rock near the waterfalls is also very excellent indeed! It will be worth even if you pay it in hundreds!”

“It seems you don’t like the picture seen by you in the last?”

A smile was lingering in the face of the artist when I asked this. “I can not say it is disliked by me. It looks like the one, which I have drawn earlier. In fact it was mine, drawn by me. I don’t know how they got it. They have kept it as a model and have copied it in toto. It was plagiarised by them; they have stolen my creative imagination. No need to worry about that. Who knows that it was I who have drawn it first? Let it be so,” said the artist.

When he finished his statement thus his face was seen with painful expressions. Again he looked at me and continued: “Leave it. Let it be gone. You have bought so many number of pictures for just two rupees. Valuable labour and enormous efforts have been bought by you for so cheap a price” said he.

“Was that picture – first drawn by you?”

“Yes.”

“Where is the original, drawn by you?”

“I have missed it; it’s lost.”

“Are there no ‘copy right’ or any such things in these?”

“Where is it? It is in vogue, and adapted very rigidly, in the world of merchants who didn’t exert or labour. But in the world of artists, who do diligently exert and work hard, even at the risk of their body and life, the very same act is like a moth-eaten book. What to do? Any body and every body can add a little more or drop a few from a original work and thereby claim it their own drawing! I had very beautifully drawn a natural scenery in which six doves were looking at the waterfalls, seated by its side with a wonderful imagination. But, some one had made some changes in it, had drawn a picture in which four crows were seated nearby a waterfalls and had wrongfully inherited as theirs. I had drawn the evening sky glowing red at the closer of the day, and the twilight horizon getting dark in which half of a crescent moon was seen in the mouth of a moving dark cloud. That has been changed by some body who had redrawn it as the third place of moon fully visible among dark clouds. It also looks good. I had drawn a picture in which I depicted the raindrops clearly visible in a lightning, during midnight when it rained from the dark sky. Some one had changed it that also. Let it be so, what is in that? It is enough, if somehow or other, the aesthetics are spread through out the world by means of arts!” Said the artist.

I could see that emotions are surging up in his heart because his hard work had been stolen, depriving him of its value; at the same time the rumblings in his heart are being pacified and calmed down then and there by his selfless heart of renunciation. I got up with a big sigh. I asked him; “can we go towards the huts?” He moved without any word. I rolled back the pictures and walked along with him.

After we covered a short distance he paused under a tree and said: “Even though, a step mother brings up a child, which was stolen by her, after all, a mother is a mother! Even though an artist steals others imagination and draws a picture, an artist is always an artist! Because he has interest in art, he steals others, imaginative creations and draws his own modeled on that. Some how he is spreading the treasure of art in the world. It is enough if the world would save the artist; if the world would not forget the good deeds of the artist,” said he.

Again, he proceeded to say: “Nothing is comparable to the hard labour of an artist. If at all we shall compare, a mother giving birth to a

child and giving it to the world alone could be compared with that. It was such a hard work, and rare one indeed" Said he.

"May be so" I said.

"Not "may be." It is an absolute truth indeed, I say. I tell it out of my own experience. **The artist sits in a corner of his house and draws something. But you shall regard it that he squeezes his life and give its essence.** You may think that there is no physical labour involved. Supposing a new imagination flashes in him; until he completes the drawing and gives it full shape his entire body and all veins will fully working with immeasurable speed. In outward appearance you cannot find out his labour. The table fan when runs fast, you will find that it doesn't run at all. The art-in-performance is also like that. It will melt down the body and the life. You can cut the wood with axe; you can shape the wood with a plane. By such labour, muscles will work hard; sweat will flow; you will have good appetite. You can have sound sleep. The body will get good shape; strength will increase. But, when the artist's brain was engaged in its labour for the creation of its imaginative world, sweat will not flow; muscles will weaken; appetite will disappear; sleep won't come; the body will wane; strength will leave. Thus, the bones in the body and the nerves in the brain will work hard, become hot and they will melt due to hard work. When I was laid up in bed in the Hospital, an elderly man was getting treatment by my side in an adjoining bed. He was working as a school teacher earlier; later he became a short-story writer. He told me that, his voice, would not weaken even if he talked together for four hours everyday with the students while he was a teacher; but it happened that after he became a writer, if he sat continuously for four weeks for writing, his voice would get choked and weakened. I had such experiences abundantly when I sat continuously for two three days to draw; my own voice would become weak, which would sound as though it came from deep well. Even teeth will be weakened; teeth would be sensitive even to bite a 'chapathi' and eat'.

I told the artist: Are we not writing a lot everyday? Writing has been one of our whole-time avocation."

"That writing is different. It gives work only to your brain. It doesn't give any work to your sense of imagination. You don't forget the surroundings and circumstances. Our profession is not like that, we do create a new world. We forget the time and the circumstances and do fly high in the world of imagination. What we see with these eyes will become false; what we see with the inner eyes of the mind will appear as true. It becomes possible only when we develop the imagination to that extent the

we become embodiment of imagination and draw the pictures. Ours if a creation, which can be equated with that of a mother carrying a child in her womb very carefully and delivering it. Each creation of the art is like that of delivering a child. The body has to under go so much hardship and pain of birth pangs and tiresomeness. It is very hard to recover from that.” Said the artist.

“Even the brain work also has its own harms”

“Yes. I don’t dispute. But the hardship and the harms suffered out of the labour you exert in an emotional condition is more than that. You just sit continuously for four hours and copy down sixteen pages from a book. Your body will not be so much tired and harmed. At the same time, you sit down for one hour and write a letter full of emotions like anger and pity; at the end of your letter your body will feel dead – tired. Why, you don’t even write; you just think over in that way. You will find out that the body becomes so tired. Apart from that, the body becomes lean and frail having worked day in and day out with these deep and subtle feelings and emotions. Will it not be a great sacrifice, that is making your body become lean and soft?”

“Nobody can deny it. Your fingers look like those of a woman!”

Immediately he looked at his own fingers and told: “Ponni’s fingers are more stronger than mine!”

“Poets have sung about the separation of lovers and it’s after effects. A woman who is separated from her lover yearns so much for her lover and consequently her external appearance undergoes changes drastically. Sage Thiruvalluvar says, “Just as darkness waits for the failing light, so does shallowness wait for the laxity of my husband’s, intercourse” in a couplet*. The emotions and after – effects of the artists are also akin to that.”

“Oh, Thiruvalluvar had told this too! True indeed! So much soft and tender is the body! So much emotionally built up life! Yours is a wonderful imagination! It is a good food for art! It appears that it can be transformed into a drawing as such!”

“Do you know Kural written by Thiruvalluvar?”

“Just heard about that. I have not read it; nor can I read. Let’s go!” saying so he moved from the shade of the tree.

* வினக்கற்றம் பார்க்கும் இருளேபோல் கொண்கன்
முயக்கற்றம் பார்க்கும் பசப்பு - குறள்: 1186

-Translation by: Drew and :Lazarus - Chapter 119 : Couplet : 6.

"After we moved a little distance he once again asked me: "Do you know, yet another thing?" "What is that?" I asked him.

"In discharging the duties or doing a work or attending to a job, others need not forget the world. But in our "Industry of imagination," to what extent we forget the world, to that extent we can win in our imagination. You know pretty well about this world. This is full of disappointments, and cheating; if you are sluggish, and gullible a little, your life itself will be at stake. Whoever will have a prosperous living in such a world? Those who never forget the nature of the world and those who could increasingly raise their strength and capability alone can exist and prosper in this world. But, these artists grow with the skill of forgetting this world and, hence, every day they are met with sufferings; they are cheated; and they wither. These days belong to the growth of fast performing machines. Even while you walk in the street, only when you keep your eyes wide open, carefully looking on all the four directions, you can escape being hurt and exist here. We who are trained well in the art of forgetting the world, even while we walk in the midst of the road we forget ourselves. Therefore, we subject ourselves to great danger. Seen in every direction, the dreaming art 'or' rather the "Industry of Imagination" lead us to end in risk to the life" said he. His face was seen with agony to the full brim. He continued: "Not even while we walk on the path, but even while we mingle and behave with others we will be ignorant how to conduct and behave ourselves. Hence, miseries and 'misfortunes will come in battalion' in search of us. The cheats will have a hey day when they sight and seize us. They will revel like a cat, when it gleefully plays with a rat it has caught. If Ponni had not come across in my life, I would have been subjected to untold sufferings due to starvation and by this time I must be dead and gone. I cannot protect and safeguard the little earnings of the day, till even the next day. Only after she came to me, she saves such earnings of a day prudently and maintains me for many days. **If there lives a group which does not know the 'Art of living' it is but the group of artists."**

"When such is the case, how does this avocation or profession still exist?" I asked him.

"The dreaming art or the 'Industry of Imagination' is very much needed for the world. As there is a need for it, it still lives on. Besides, if one happens to get trained in it even by mistake, then there after there is no freedom from that. Even though it poses difficulty for the outward life, there is a special kind of happiness in the heart of heart. *A mother carry's a babe in the womb for nearly ten months and before delivering the child she undergoes a lot of pain and agony; but once she has born it out, and sees*

the face of the child she forgets the birth pangs, the pain and agony and all; she gets into ecstasy, isn't it? Like that, after we created a new thing we are able to forget all our pains and sufferings. But, just because the mind is happy, the sufferings and tiredness of the body will not be cured or driven out. Once the body gets weakened it remains as such. And there is no way to regain its old strength." Said the artist.

The nine pictures bought by me have made him to speak so elaborately. The artist who used to draw pictures on the floor of the china Bazaar with bent head towards earth, and who never looked upon anybody nor talked to anybody has spoken at length now, which gave me surprise. As soon as he saw those nine pictures, he was struck with new feeling and sensation as though he had entered into the world of artist and was living as a group along with them. His heart which was like a closed casket – has been opened by these pictures. He spoke with open heart. He forgot that he alone was here, but while talking, he often used the first person plural 'we' repeatedly. When I saw his emotional state, I also got a feeling of refreshment. I was hearing him, forgetting my 'self', and stood there.

Then he moved further. I also walked along with him. We went towards the low-lying area where the huts are situated. We saw the walls of many of the huts have collapsed and fallen. We went a little further, and saw slushy mud in some places, and water still logged in some places. We stopped going further and stood there. By this time the sun has set; darkness began to spread every where: stars began to twinkle one by one. A few stars which appeared bright and gave out light were hidden by the dark clouds which began to gather from the western sky. The reddish horizon began to become dark slowly. The electric trains (EMUS) were running with loud rattling noise that pierced the ears. A rickshaw man was seen pulling his rickshaw, in a depressed mood moving along the road, while scolding some unknown person: "I don't know who even was that cursed sinner, whom I had first met in the morning." A dog was seen running, while barking towards or against something. We saw a mongoose, which crossed our pathway and ran towards a bush and disappeared. Two electric trains, one from the north to south and another from south to north simultaneously were seen running which caused the noise more louder. Then, we saw two unknown persons running towards us. One among them came towards the artist with anger and hastiness, neared him, and caught his hand and pulled him saying: "Oh, you are a lame man! That's why you have done this mischief!" The other man staying at a distance yelled out; "Is he a lame man? God, almighty is fair to grant a 'tiny little tail' to the mischievous lamb!" The former told: "It is a usual occurrence often at this place." The other man shouted: "come with us! We will straight away take you to the police station and hand over you

there! You can talk the rest with them!" Artist did not open his mouth; he kept quiet.

I was awe-struck, as I could not comprehend what was happening. "What is it all, sir? Why are you pulling him like this? Have you mistaken him for some body else? What do you think of him to disrespect him like this?"

"I think of him as a man."

"At the first sight itself, it becomes clear that he is a Rowdi."

"Does he need any respect?"

"Who is he? Is he his associate?"

"One has to throw the stone; the other has to pluck the purse and run away. Hence, two persons are required to accomplish the mission; isn't it?"

I could not tolerate what they spoke. "Listen to me, listen to me! Don't be hasty. You are pulling somebody who is unconnected to an act committed by some one else. Does it not need an enquiry and a fair dispensation of justice?" I said.

"Have you come here to advocate for justice? You need not have any argument with us. There is an appointed place for this, you come there." Said the man who was wearing a white shirt.

"The stone came from here only. I am not to be cheated to-day as I happened to be the other day. Hence, even while approaching this place I was very attentive. I have caught him red handed." Said the other man who was in Khaki dress.

I realised that they would not pay heed to my words. Anyhow I wanted that I should try to make them hear, and I said: "He is a poor man, who is residing at one of these huts here. I am residing at Amanthakarai. We have just come here to see the place and personally ascertain whether the water, which had marooned this place earlier, has drained and whether the ground has dried up, it seems that some body has done some mischief. You have mistook us, as those who had done it, and are giving us trouble." I said.

"He says that he has just come to see the place!"

"He says 'some body has done something!' These people claim no knowledge of that! Have you seen this? Could you believe them?"

"This man says that we are giving him trouble!"

"They are well trained to speak and present false things!"

"What nonsense is it? Instead of throwing stones on car like this, you can very well steal things and go to jail!"

Only now I began to understand what is what. I realised now that they came driving the car; the man with Khaki shirt is the driver; the other man is the owner; some stone fell on the car; the man who has thrown the stone on the car has done so, from some hidden place, and after throwing the stone he has run away. It appeared to me that, whatever explanation is given to them, they cannot understand the real truth because of their anger and hastiness. Only after realising this truth the artist, without uttering a word, had kept his mouth closed and was moving calmly. I also began to walk. When we approached the road I could discern that some change has happened in the mind of the owner. He told me; "That man who had committed the act is keeping his mouth closed and is following our command. Why should you come forward to bolster his case? You mind your business and go away; we will take him alone and hand him over to the police."

"How can I go away? Impossible. Just because he is silent, without uttering a word, how can you jump into conclusion that he has done that? I came here along with him. We are innocent; we didn't commit any sin. We were simply talking together. You intend to single out him as the one who allegedly committed the crime, and want him to be taken to the police, should you?" I uttered these words painfully with anger.

"Then you both have to come to the police. Let the police man enquire you and decide" said he.

At that time we have neared the car. Driver opened the car and asked us to "get in." Even at that time, Artist tried to get into the car without saying a word. I lent him a helping hand to get into the car. Then I also got into the car and seated in it. As they also boarded into the car it headed towards Govt. College of Integrated Medicine. (G.C.I.M) I could distinctly feel some sort of change that had taken place in the mind of the owner. Thereafter, he did not talk anything. The driver also had felt the change and drove the car without speaking. But it was felt that no change had taken place in his mind. Front side glass pan of the car had got smashed to pieces

in the impact of the stone throw. A few broken glass pieces were strewn in the place where we were seated. The artist could not be seated comfortably in the place; he was just moving himself this way and that way. I thought some of the glass pieces would have been there and it might be just pricking him.

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THE car stopped in front of the Police Station. All of us got down from the car. The owner of the car went inside first. The driver first allowed us to go in front of him and then he came behind us as though he was the security guard to see that we won't run away.

The owner asked a police man there: "Where is your Inspector?"

The policeman saluted him and told: "He has gone out on duty. He will come back".

The owner then showed us to him and said: "Let these two men be here. You tell the Inspector when he comes back. You inform him that I had come" so saying he gave him his visiting card from his pocket. He continued : "When we were coming near the Railway Crossing, a big stone came from the left; it fell on the front side glass pan of the car; the glass pan crashed to pieces. Driver had got hit slightly in his left hand and blood drops also came. The glass pieces at the impact of smash fell scattered on my shoulders. Driver and myself got down from the car and went in the direction from where the missile was thrown. These two people were seen there; they were baffled to see us. We had not seen them throwing the stone; but the stone exactly came from the place where they were seen. No body else than these two were there. Other things, you please enquire and find out. I have an urgent work; and I shall go. You please write down Car No, Name of the Driver, License No etc. We shall leave."

"What do those two men say?" asked a police man.

"That lame man did not open his mouth so far. But this man tells something", said the owner.

"Oh, that man has not opened his mouth! We will see to that! We have key to make his mouth open. You may please go", said that police man.

When I heard these words, I was seething with anger. I looked into the face of the artist. I can not see any thing there; I just suppressed all my anger and kept quiet.

Immediately, the two policemen went here and there. They saw the broken glass pieces etc. They noted down the number. They saw the left hand of the Driver. Then the car went away. After it had gone, the police men

came to us to enquire. "You shall tell the truth, understand?" thus they threatened us.

At first, one of them asked the artist: "Lame man, What's your name?"

"Mohan" said the artist, opening his mouth for the first time.

"Oh, it sounds like a name found usually among great wealthy people!"

I could not keep patience beyond that limit. "Sir, stop yourself talking useless and disrespectful words. What you should ask legally, you may ask. What you should write down, you may do so. What sort of punishment you want to give, you can give. These wounding words shall be dropped." I told.

"Oh, oh! Sir seems to be a big person!" he mocked at me.

"These mockery, ridiculing, all such things should be stopped immediately. I know a little bit of law. If you desire so, I will take full responsibility for the entire offence. You leave him and punish me for that. This sort of disrespectful and useless talk should be put on end to".

At once the police man came near me, looked at me and asked me: "What's your name?"

"Thiruvencatam" I answered.

"What are you?"

"I am a clerk in the Court".

As soon as he heard these words of mine, not only his voice, but also his look underwent changes. He asked me: "How did you allow yourself caught up in this nuisance?"

"Did you say that I volunteered myself to be caught up in this? Some unknown had committed the offence; because we were seen there in front of them, they caught us and brought us here".

The police man with a fair heart told me: "You can go, please; we will just enquire him, and later send him away."

Immediately, the artist looked at me and pleaded: "Ayya, that is good. You will please go away". My heart just melted to hear these two precise sentences he spoke after a long pause.

"I won't accept it at all" refusing this I looked at him and then at the police man.

Then the police man called the attention of the artist and told: "You just accept that it was you who committed the offence; let him go."

"Yes, it was I who did it; not him," saying this he just bent his head down.

"Lie, it's a lie! For my sake, with an intention to get me removed from this scene, he utters this lie. I will not at all accept this. I was with him throughout. He didn't do anything. It is an empty lie," I shouted.

Policeman was struck with awe and bewilderment. At that moment we heard the hoot of a car, and its engine coming to a halt. "Oh, the Inspector is coming! Let him come" I thought and awaited for him. But, he didn't come. Someone else came in search of him and asked: "Whether Inspector is in?" and asking thus he left instantly.

The policeman thereafter separated me from the artist. They began to question us separately. I at once told the policeman who took the artist away from me: "He is my close friend, you know? You should not threaten him, nor coerce him in any way! You can do whatever you wish to do with me". "Is that our duty?" saying so he took the artist separately.

When they had completed the independent enquiries conducted upon us, they once again left us in the same old place together. The two policeman just talked together something between themselves.

I was pained to tell the artist. "What is it? Having kept quiet without opening your mouth you have uttered a very great lie?"

"You please do not suffer for my sake. Only because of me, you were also caught up? You only came to see me, isn't it? You shall please go away. You wife, children and all will be waiting for your arrival."

"Will not your wife and children also be waiting for you?"

"True it is. Why should both the families be put to worry? If one family suffers, at least another family may be relieved of the distress. Therefore, I request you may please go." Thus said the artist.

I told him: "You will go instead; I will stay back."

"The policemen said that they would send away only you. They will never tell the same for me. I am poorest among the poor; living in a hut;

not known to civilization: I am not a white collared man. They will be never so lenient towards me to tell like that."

Each and every word he used to describe himself, shot at my heart like arrows, and they wounded it. I asked him: "Why did you neither oppose nor refute them? How could you remain with a stony heart like this?"

"As there is no other go, I can't help it"

"Then you will have to be punished."

"Will they leave me, if I speak the truth to oppose and refute them? I have seen this happening to the people in our slum once or twice a month. Moreover, it is the month end. You cannot escape from it. Three months earlier, on one occasion, Kundhamma's husband, who had not committed any offence, was caught, remained in the jail for three days. I have seen many instances like this. Having been brought to this place, it is good if one concedes to accept the commission of offence rather than refusing to admit it. You just ask about this in our slum area, anybody tells that it is a fact."

"Alas! We regret for you, oh law" I gave a sigh.

Suddenly I noticed that there was some sort of alertness landed on the police station and the policemen all stood silently in their respective places. One policeman looked at me telling: "The Inspector is coming." I was silently sitting along with the artist. Without alighting from the car he called out: "Three fourteen", one policeman ran to the front and saluted him and wished him.

"Did anybody come here?"

"Purasawakkam Mudaliar came. It's a case, involving two persons..."

"Are they here?"

"Yes".

"Let them remain here; I think there's no urgency? I will come back in the morning and look into the matter. Driver! Go straight to the club."

The car sped away. The police constable who went to the front came back and said: "So, you will be enquired only in the morning. You please be here until that. You shall stay in that room". He at once asked another policeman to open the cell. The other police man said: "Let him go; let that man alone stay back."

I told them: "No, no it can't be. You leave both of us if you could; otherwise we both will remain here. Or else, you please leave him; I will remain."

Immediately that policeman told the other man: "Why should we get into trouble? Let both of them stay. It is a case from a highly influential circle. If we commit any mistake it may bring us havoc."

The cell was opened. We went inside I experienced a shock in my heart. "It's an experience, which we never once had earlier. Isn't it?" I asked the artist.

He answered: "No, I have already got it earlier. Then I was in Washermenpet."

"When?"

"Three years ago."

"Why?"

"For being innocent; for not committing any crime."

"Say, 'for having been born poor'."

"Why we should repeat it again and again?"

"Your Ponni will be worried a lot."

"Yes. But, what to do? Let her be worried. Since she has also a share in this."

"Share in what?"

"Share in committing the crime of not living a life of wealth and pomp. Does she not have a share in not getting herself united to live with a man of 'highly influential circle'?"

A constable came to lock up the cell. "Do you wish to have anything? I am going to lock up the cell."

"I wish to have the dawn of the day" said I.

He locked up the cell without any word. He removed the key from the lock and placed it safely. Then, he went and sat down leaning against a pillar. He began to sing in a very low voice a lyric from a popular film of the time, which begins thus:

"Shall we, the poor, ever have the taste of pleasures?"

It was a good, and melodious song; our heart was melting. Many lines were not clearly audible. He was singing it in a very low voice; he sang it with some sort of fear of reprieve. "To the extent it is heard, it's good" thinking so, we were listening to it.

After some time yawning came from him. Artist also yawned. I too followed suit. After some more time, the sound of the vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement slowly dwindled. A sort of calmness prevailed within the station. The constable who was leaning against the pillar was caught up in sleep that his head began to swing this way and that way. According to the turn-duty laid down for para sentry, one police man came and took up position for sentry. The artist lied down on the floor. I was thinking about Nagu, leaning against the wall. She did not know my miserable plight. She would be scolding me, assuming that I had gone somewhere for attending a dinner party and had stayed overnight there itself. Some sort of a feeling of unhappiness crept into my heart. Artist was seen sleeping with heavy breathing. Had only the Inspector stayed a little and enquired us even from the parked vehicle, I could have revealed my identity stating my occupation etc, and could have got release on security including the artist, and could have gone home, I anguished. I also lied down and tried to sleep. I could not easily get sleep, because of absence of a pillow to sleep with. But the artist was sleeping on the floor - without even mat or sheet-free from worries.

The artist was caught up in a dream during his sleep, it seemed, and he blabbered in the dream. The words he uttered then were not Tamil words. He spelt one name, twice then: "NIRMALA.....NIRMALA." Other words uttered by him were such that I could not find out what exactly was the language he spoke then. I could have easily found out if only those words were from Telugu, Malayalam or Kannada. Most probably it must be a language spoken in the up- country (North India). At that time I recollected the words of Kumaresan commenting about the artist. Moreover, I also thought about his name "Mohan" as told by him to the police constable. Tamils have also used to name the children as "Mohan", but it prevailed only among the rich and privileged class of people; poor people never resorted to name their children as 'Mohan'. Did he hail from a rich family? Whether he had met with some unexpected calamity in the life and had come out, and landed here? He had told me that he had come here only four or five years back and stayed in the front side sitting perch of the hut of Kundhamma. Ponni was also not his wedded wife. She was made to be his partner by Kundhamma. Four years earlier Ponni was somewhere else. Had only he was born and brought up in slum, would he have acquired and developed, skill in such a great fine art? He said he did not know to read and write.

But in his speech, lot of wisdom and matured knowledge was revealed. Just as he unhesitatingly told a lie while accepting to admit the offence “. It’s I who did it” to the policeman, will there be a ‘big lie’ hiding behind in his life also? - Thus I was thinking of so many probabilities, for making of assumptions.

The artist who was sleeping, lying on his right side, just turned to lie on his left. Then as the light from the lamp fell on his face, I could find his face clearly. I just rose up, and sat and then looked at his face. Within some minutes, it appeared that he began to dream again. The face began to show different kinds of expressions. His sleeping face showed that he has undergone different kind of emotions, just as a sleeping child in the cradle would weep and smile. In between, the carefree peacefulness seen in the day time, was also seen in his face. Again and again, signs of misery and sufferings appeared. How-so-ever peaceful might be an artist in outward appearance, he could not be like a dead wood free from emotions. Even though the turbulent feelings and emotions built up in his heart of heart might not be erupting, very minute and subtle feelings might be present and bubbling without fail - this was indeed well understood by me at that time.

Suddenly, he rolled to one side and placed his hand on his chest and sighed. His face shrank due to misery. “HARE AAMAGE DEGA AAMI” - thus he blabbered. He slowly opened his eyes and looked. As he saw me he asked: “Have you not yet slept?”

“No” I said.

“Without mat and pillow you were not used to sleep, Alas!”

“That was not the reason; it is a new place.”

“This hardship occurred to you because of me.”

“No, nothing like that, It seems that hardship would certainly occur in one’s life some how or other. It has come in this way now.”

“You please lie down without worrying. You try to close your eyes; sleep will soon catch up you automatically.”

“Why can’t we try to remain without sleeping for one day?”

“Why shall you do so?” saying this he laughed.

The police constable on sentry duty came before us and rebuked.

“What is that? Don’t talk; go to sleep.”

"We don't get sleep; we were just talking to each other" I said.

"Don't talk aloud; lower your voice; but don't laugh" instructing us thus, he went away.

Artist was laughing with low voice and told "prohibitory orders for laughing." Looking at the roll of pictures he told: "please see, because these pictures have connection with me, these were also got punished to be locked up in the cell. The pictures which are to adorn palaces and bangalows have been rolled up and lying down here in the jail."

The policeman who was in sentry duty, having completed his turn, was trying to shake and wake up the next man who has to take up the sentry duty called him out: "Time is over, get up please." But the policeman who was in deep sleep, was blabbering "I have to write down diary; you leave me" and he pushed away the hands of the policeman who tried to wake him up and he rolled to the other side to continue his sleep! The clock struck twelve then. At a little distance some one else was sleeping while snoring aloud. At small distance off from there, in a small ditch, a frog was giving its solo sound which appeared as though it was playing an instrumental background music to the snoring song of the former. An insect in the wall was continuously raising noise 'grrrr' which resembled as a joint orchestra played along with the sound of the frog. The sole listener of the musical performance, a lizard in the beam over our head was raising its voice 'tick..tick..' as though it applauded the music and the recital.

"Alas! What sin has the lizard committed! This also is undergoing imprisonment! "Saying thus the artist laughed without raising his voice.

"It has committed the same offence as we did. It's the sin of not residing in the house of the privileged who owns a car," I said.

The artist again made a laugh in low voice. This was the day in which I happen to come across his laughing several times, to his hearts contentment; that too was possible only in the cell. Ponni must have had the opportunity of witnessing his laughing on several occasions at home.

Immediately, it came to my mind that he dreamt while asleep and blabbered. I told him: "You are hiding your real life without revealing it to others."

"This is my real life. Today only I live the real life. You have had the opportunity to be by my side and witness it" saying so he smiled.

"While blabbering in the dream you did not speak Tamil!"

“When we blabber during our dream words will not be clearly audible. Therefore, it would have appeared to you as though it was a different language. If the tongue fails to perform its role accurately while speaking, Tamil itself would sound like a different language. That’s all!” again he laughed without any noise from the mouth.

I said. “You uttered somebody’s name as NIRMALA... NIRMALA...”

Immediately his laughing and smiling vanished from his face. He remained silently with his head bent down. He heaved a sigh. Then he spoke: “I dreamt a dream.”

I was about to open my mouth and asked him: “What dream was it?” But having noticed the drastic changes that appeared in his countenance, I stopped asking about it.

Para sentry duty policemen changed duties according to their turn. The ‘snoring song’ changed in the sense that its sound gradually lowered. The frog has stopped playing the orchestra. The lizard’s present stay was not at sight. A lorry was proceeding in the road at a very low speed. At some distance away, the groaning from an exotic jersey-cow-was heard, which was less pleasant for the ears. A rifle was leaning against the wall; on top of the nistle, at the very end, two cockroaches were seen perched, and they were wrestling. At that time wind blew fast and it caused the noise of the leaves of the pipal tree by the side of the station to raise. Then, unexpectedly, the lizard from its hide-out raised its noise “tick...tick...” and revealed to us that it was also awake. At a far of place, we could hear the blowing of the whistle of a police man who was on his night rounds in some street.

Artist then heaved a sigh and raised his bent head. “It won’t be wrong to share with you; you have closely associated with me; I will tell you all” saying this he stopped. Then again he heaved a sigh.

“NIRMALA was none other else than my wedded wife. Art nurtured and promoted our love. Beauty was the primary cause for attraction from either side. I was then crazy or mad after the belief that ‘Beauty was all pervading with immense capability to sweep.’ Only after I had the close relationship with Ponni, what immense capability was surcharging in Love was realised by me. The all-pervading capability of love is not exposed and seen so much initially; but its superiority is certainly felt in due course. Beauty initially exposes in capacity and it securely binds us in shackles. But you cannot tell whether its charismatic capability will last long. It is but ephemeral. During those days when I passionately loved Nirmala and married

her this truth was not known to me. We were doing well and lived happily; but it all lasted for two years. Within that period disgust and dejection had crept in. I will not entirely put the blame on her. I cannot make up my mind for that. Countless beautiful young girls were swarming around me competing with each other to win my love. The reason for that was not my outstanding personality; but, the outstanding capability of the art that has grown up with me. It was indeed the excellence of the Bengali Art. My mind naturally went after Nirmala. Nirmala was also equally happy to seek my hand. This had resulted in her parents prejudice and hatred upon her, which was a fact known to me. There were also condemnations out of acrimony by several persons that she a graduate (with B.A. degree) had gone after a boy who discontinued intermediate class. Unmindful of those humiliating and cursing words she came to live with me saying that the excellence of the art in me could not be measured with the yardstick of educational achievement like intermediate and B.A.”

The clock struck one. Almost all-external sounds have settled down and stopped to an undisturbed calmness. The snoring sound too had stopped. The peace and tranquility prevailed then was to such an extent that even the heart-beat of mine could be heard by me. Those cockroaches which were seen perched on the tip of the Rifle and wrestling had stopped their war, saluting to the peace there and have gone away to a far off place.

The Artist paused for a little while, and then continued his talk.

“Slowly and gradually lapses in both of us began to be visible to each other. I had also certain lapses on my part; I will not deny it. First of all, I had no mind to accept responsibility in anything; neither I had that ability also. My parents have brought me up in such a way that I was quite ignorant of such cares and concerns. I was unaware of the prevailing prices of commodities like salt and chilies. Mathematical problems like rupees and paise additions and subtractions were written and solved by me in school days only, that too, for the sake of teachers and the examinations. Otherwise, neither for the sake of me, nor for the sake of others had I attempted to solve such rupees-paise problems. I continued to be such a care-free bird even after my marriage. She was also brought up in a wealthy and privileged surroundings. But her attitude was entirely different. She would magnify and blow up any small news and dwell at length in her speech. She won't come to a sudden and bold conclusion on anything. She would make repetitions of what was once told by her and spend her time. She would sometime think deeply for an hour even for a thing of half-an-anna's worth. She could not take a quick decision about what were important and what were unimportant but analysing them and would kill the time in pussyfooting

and procrastination. Supposing I was in a deep imagination, thinking about a very good drawing and seated in a corner of the house, she would come and pester upon me with questions of unnecessary and least important botherations like what vegetables are to be bought for cooking, what should be the colour of the saree to be worn, whose residence should we visit and when; and by these questions she would disturb my imagination. I would be wild with anger; I would scold her and send her away; I would put my hands on the head and would be in deep sorrow as though I had lost some precious thing. Do you think that she was disinterested in drawing? No, not like that. She had abundant liking in the art. Even though she had less proficient in creativity, she had immense capacity and interest to enjoy the creation. If at all I draw and completed a drawing, it was she who would enjoy it fully and feel glad. At first, I would explain about that creations only to her; I would also entertain and adore her review only as the first and foremost of reviews. There is a flaw or lapse, not only in her, but almost found in everybody. That flaw was the cause for widening the gap between me and her and that promoted dislike between us. Take for instance a worker. A worker at first goes in search of job. He gets a hob; joins it; and get confirmed in the work. Later on, his concentration shrinks. He never work there whole-heartedly. Somehow, in view of the monthly wages - an assured income—he gets there, he just remains, or loiters there to while away the time. His mind begins to travel and wander in the outside world. He has no inclination to quit the job; because, he has a source of permanent income there. But, during his working hours, he has no enthusiasm in work; he just remains as though exhausted by weariness. At all other times, he passes his time, in this and that shops, and houses of these and those people busily engaging himself. In the same manner, we could see young men and women are disposed. Till such time they get married, they are with lot of expectations about marriage. When once they got married, they do spend their life very happily quite for some time. Afterwards, they just pass the time in the home to fulfil the obligation, and go out in search of name and fame; and in search of respectable friendship. I am not finding fault with to say that their morality has eroded. But, I want to tell the fact that their minds oscillate, and vascillate. I happened find out this lapse in her too. In due course, she began to move in search of love and affection from those who are surrounding rather than seek the love and affection from me. She sought and desired for the respect from outsiders rather than that of me. She began to consider and live for her name and fame as greater than the self-respect of mine. A monkey's heart that of hers, - which began to yearn for the thing not available rather than with that which was available,-had spoilt her. She totally rejected all the duties she was obliged to do for me; she spent her entire time, in associating and mingling with and enjoy herself with all other women - folk in the town,

and also in visiting the houses of whoever had invited her with eagerness and enthusiasm. "Is she a life partner?" When this question was posed in my heart a sort of dejection and dislike entered into and rooted firmly in my mind. It could be put in this way-as there was no other go, we both stayed in one and the same house. The life built by love had gone to that extremity. I have to confess that there were also short falls on my part. I tried to ascend the world of art, keeping the family as a ladder that would help for achieving that. She also, in the same manner used the family as a ladder to ascend to and travel in the world of respectable and luxurious life. Both of us failed to protect and adore the family life as our soul objective. What was the net result found? She appeared to be a great nuisance for my world of art. I was apparently a big hindrance in her way to achieve her goal of luxury world. There was the law and the society, posing great hurdles for us, from seeking separation from each other. The family then appeared to be a very horrible dungeon than this ordinary jail. I think it was she who should have undergone so much agony because of the deadlock. Because, I had the capability of totally forgetting this world and fly high in my own world of imagination. I would sit and concentrate on drawing beautiful and excellent pictures. I would forget the time that slipped by and engage myself hours together in drawing, I would forget this lady-family-respect-luxury-difficulties and detractions-and all such thinking completely. Instead, I would draw creations like sky, clouds, moon, crescent, mountains, waterfalls, beautiful damsel, pretty child, weeping and laughing, squirrel, doves, rain, flood, eyes, lips, walk and gaiety, pleasure and would sit elated with pride. I would be the unquestioned monarch there reigning supreme; mine would be the governance par excellence; there won't be any enemy or any hindrance for my rule; and I would be the sole authority there. This was a boon to me, which, she was not blessed with. She was too good; and hence, she must have been undergoing a lot of agony and suffering having been unable to cut off the family bondage; what to do? Had only I was blessed then with the wider knowledge now I had acquired, I would have affectionately invited her to a dinner, talked to her peacefully; *"Farewell to thee Nirmala, where ever you are, you shall live happily"* saying thus I would have sent of her and parted with her; neither the clarity of wisdom, nor the dauntless courageousness now I possess were then with me."

The clock stuck half-past one. Even though I was very eager to hour him, I was pained to think of his sorrowful plight and hence I said: "You please go to sleep; we will speak to-morrow."

"No sleeping hereafter. My old mind has awakened from sleep" he said.

A cock unwittingly cried untimely from somewhere; A sparrow raised its voice while flying overhead.

He continued to speak: "On one day I was going along the Rash Behari Avenue."

"In which town?" I asked.

"In Calcutta. As soon as we got married, we were put up in a portion upstairs, at a place in Calcutta. I used to draw good pictures; and I used to get an income of rupees five hundred to six hundred per month. At that time, I started to draw a very good picture of **"a parrot perched on the branch of a tree and a beautiful young lady enjoying, looking at it and talking to it."** I have nearly completed it. The look of the parrot, the look of the lady at the parrot, the structure or form of her face and its appearance, a guava fruit in her hand - all these of the drawing had come appropriately. But, **the standing posture of the lady**, ie. the style of her standing on the legs was not appealing - as it was quite traditional - no novelty was revealed. My mind became restive. For three continuous days I tried a variety of standing postures in the drawing. But those styles were inappropriate and did not fit in well; they were like pale black borders unmatchable to golden coloured sliik saree. I did not like them. I tried my level best to bring in the youth and shyness bubbling in the lady in her standing posture. I was longing to bring out the posture as I wished, throughout the day. I left the house plunged in thinking, and I was walking along the pathway. I walked through Rash Behari Avenue. I happened to see a Tamil girl on the opposite platform on the road where I was walking along; she was talking to a youth, while she was touching the motor car parked there with one hand. I saw her standing posture; I lost my heart in that very standing posture and style of hers. I happened to see the very posture of standing legs which I had been longing and pining to bring-out in my drawing, for the preceeding three days. A Feeling of freshness ran through the whole of my body. A sort of spiritfulness and enthusiasm rose up and spread in my brain, that I had discovered the enchanting beauty that I yearned to bring out. The standing posture and style of those legs vividly portrayed the attractive youth and bashfulness. The 'potrait-in-life' was drawn and enshrined in my heart. That was all. What did I do subsequently, I was unaware of. Later on, I recapitulated what would have happened from the descriptions given by those who were seen around me in the hospital. **Without looking either side my legs would have borne me towards the opposite platform.** The eyes faithfully would have followed the direction where the mind advanced; and the legs would have truthfully followed the way where eyes proceeded. Had only I were aware and alive of this world, I would have had the sense of existence in flesh-and-

blood in the world. While I had forgotten myself, My mind was flying high taking me to "Kandharva Loga" or 'the world of Aesthetics' built in dreams. But when the mind could fly, could the body in flesh-and blood also fly like it? It had actually attempted to do so and had invited itself great danger. After that I came to my senses and consciousness only in the hospital. There were none of my friends and relatives by my bedside. Only doctors and nurses were standing around me. It was like awakening from deep slumber; it also looked like a dream, I thought to find out the reason why I had come here. My hands and legs were bandaged "Why did I come here?" I asked the doctor who was standing in from of me.

"On your way, you fell and got fractured a little. We have bandaged. You need not have any fear about that. Don't worry at all, within two three days you will be all right,' he said. I wanted to move my legs a little, but I could not. I thought it must be because of the bandage. I wanted to touch it with my hands and tried to raise my hand; one hand only could be raised. Another hand was very heavy. That also was heavily bandaged. I sobbed and then wept aloud. My cheeks were wet with tears. The nurse advised not to weep; she firmly told me that my weeping will weaken my body and harm it. I again wept, with the thinking that already the body had got crushed and fractured, and what else had to happen. The nurse coerced me, telling: 'if you again weep they would administer compose through injection and they would make you insensitised', I cried aloud to tell her that let her advise them to administer poison to kill me rather than giving me sedation. A man who was in the next bed nearby my side told advising me: "What are you man? You seem to be educated; why are you crying like this? Keep quiet. As soon as the doctors come, you should abide by what they instruct. You have no problem. Don't fear." He was none other then the short story writer about whom I have referred to earlier. I could discern kindness and affection ripe in his look. I kept quite for some on his advise. "Am I not keeping quiet? You just look at me; they have removed even one of my legs; amputated; am I not lying quiet taking in the pills and medicines given by them?" He said. I just cried aloud: "Ayya, is it the place where legs are amputated? Are they going to remove my legs too? Was it therefore impossible to move my legs?" He in turn said: "Are you mad? I was suffering from diabetes; sugar level increased; shoe pinch which lead to ulceration became sore. Therefore, they had amputated my leg. What's wrong with you? You are young; you have a well built physique; unexpectedly, you met with an accident having been hit on your way by a motor car; a little blow and fracture, I don't know why you are much worried." Thereafter, sorrows and miseries were surging up like successive waves and were settling down." Artist stopped here, after narrating his past story up to this.

At that time, the clock struck two, and on hearing that he said: "That's all; what else? If you happen to remain awake, still what will happen to your body?"

I said: "Hereafter I cannot sleep." Then I gave a sigh. I asked him further: "Does Ponni know all this past history about you?"

"Nobody knows. I did not even tell Ponni. What use, will it be? That Mohan was a different man; he was very fond of luxurious life. He was living in a portion upstairs in Calcutta. He was getting an income of rupees five hundred to six hundred per month. He would have high class food. He was an artist used to produce colourful pictures with numerous hues. He had studied up to intermediate. He was different man and the present Mohan who belongs to Ponni is altogether a distinctly different person from the former. The present man is poor; lives in a hut; he can go to sleep at will with out pillow and mat. He can take in with pleasure the poor man's food like porridge and semi-solid liquids of cereals with pickles alone as side dish, and be contented with that. He is capable of bringing beauty in just line drawings of charcoal. He is an unlettered man not introduced to alphabets. The other man is Bengali where as he is a Tamilian. Why should you create confusion and chaos in the clear and unblemished mind of Ponni the beloved of this man telling about the other man?" said he.

"Thereafter?" I asked extending my inquisitiveness.

"What 'thereafter'? Night came in. I fell asleep. The next day evening there were numerous visitors flocking around almost all the beds; they were making kind enquiries about the respective patients' health. Only my cot remained orphaned. When the nurse came I spoke to her; I gave my house address asking her to send word to my house. She took down the address, went to the reception to arrange for sending the message. She soon returned to me and told that they had already informed. She herself told me that my purse contained one hundred rupee note and two five rupee notes and small visiting card containing my address. Might be, perhaps when the messenger went there, my wife would not have been there. Telling this suggestion, I asked her to send information once again. I also told her that her brother's house was in Canning street and perhaps she might have gone there, and a message might be sent to that address too. She heard all my requests with patience and noted them down. The next day they shifted me to another bed on wheels and they pushed it to the Operation Theatre.

On seeing the hall and other pointed and glittering instruments I shivered. "What Doctor! What nurse! Please tell me! Please tell me what are you going to do?" I cried aloud. "Nothing to worry. We are going to remove

the bandage and see the wounds" so saying they administered anesthesia. They asked me to count one, two, three. Along with my counting of numbers some other thinking also came up in my mind. Remembrance of my deceased mother came up. I also thought of my wife Nirmala. The drawing which was left incomplete; the picture of the beautiful young lady talking to the parrot and standing in a posture full of youthhood and bashfulness also came up in my thought. I now could recollect that I had been counting up to twenty three. When I woke up and opened my eyes again it was already night. At first I sighted only the affectionate and kind look of the story-writer's eyes. "What sir! What have they done to me?" I asked him, "They have done nothing. They have saved you preventing any danger that might have occurred to your life." Said he. "What about my legs?" asking thus I tried to touch my legs with my hands. I was shocked and bewildered when I felt things like two stumps. "You have to gather courage and console yourself; what would have been a dangerous hit on the head, had indeed missed, and merely taken away the hat." I sobbed and wept repeatedly. The nurse who noted down my address came to me and consoled. "Perhaps they may come tomorrow evening; we have sent message for a second time." At that moment I did not care for anybody. I wept aloud and shed tears only for the loss of my legs. The story-writer attempted to console me telling a lot of morals. His words proved ineffective. I wept to my hearts content. Only when my tears have drained I stooped it and calmed down. The sedation administered to me to set me into sleep proved effective than those good consoling words by him. On the next day, when it was dawn, I woke up with the sorrowful thinking, with tears rolling down my eyes, that I am now a cursed lame man without legs. Where on the previous day I was sleeping in the bed with my body stretching to the whole length of the cot; but today, it had been shortened to half its length, and realising the fact I lamented on my lot. The story-writer sang a few songs which were moving and melting the heart. He sang from Gitanjali the following songs:

*DEATH, thy servant, is at my door. He has
crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to
my home.*

*I will worship him with folded hands, and with
tears, I will worship him placing at his feet the
treasure of my heart.*

*ON the day when death will knock at thy door
what wilt thou offer to him?*

Oh, I will set before my quest the full vessel of my life-I will never let him go with empty hands.

O THOU the last fulfilment of life, Death, my death, come and whisper to me!

I HAVE got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure.

AT this time of my parting, wish me good luck, my friends! The sky is flushed with the dawn and my path lies beautiful.

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.

These my lamps are blown out at every little puff of wind, and trying to light them I forget all else again and again.

*And now I am eager to die into the deathless.**

On hearing those songs my heart melted. The agony and misery which were present the previous day were completely absent that day. At times like the flash of lightning a feeling of courageousness would come up that there would not be any use or effect in weeping and I would have to receive it, whatever had come-and then it would vanish. On that day, at the stroke of four, friends and relatives of all other inpatients, came with fruits and biscuits and flocked together their respective beds. None came near my bed. The wife of the story writer who was a lean woman came to see him; there were also three other visitors for him who were his old students. They were talking to him with so much affection and love. Story writer, flanked by his visitors, looked at me affectionately and asked: "Are you not married?" "No" I answered and I rumbled within me holding my chest. I just turned my face towards side and I was worried with tears to the full brim. It appeared as

though there was a heavy block with in the chest which was so much painful as though it would kill me. I just burst out and sobbed with in me: telling: "Nirmala, you a cursed sinner, a damned devil!" When I was caught up in the speeding car brought to the Hospital bandaged and lying in the bed, I had at least right to weep; but now, I had lost even the right; misery blocked my chest and added my suffering. Indeed, I had not felt that such a horrible accident had occurred in my life on that day when I felt for the first time lying in the hospital with heavy bandages; but, only on that day I felt that really a very much horrible accident had occurred to me, and I writhed with painful agony."

I saw tears flowing down the eyes of the artist who had an unperturbed heart in any extreme inconveniences. Tears swelled in my eyes too. He wept and I too wept. A policeman came and stood in front of us and told: "keep quiet; go to sleep." What sir, having committed an act, you now weep; do you think, that you would be let off that easily?" I just wiped off my tears and looked at him; he went away. The artist was seen with his heads bent down. The floor where he sat was found to be wet.

After some time the artist gathered courage and got his heart consoled. He raised his head and began to continue his narration: "During those days I wholly lived for art. I wanted to use Nirmala for that. She lived for the regard and respect from the people of the world. She wanted to use me as an instrument for that. We two tried separately to ascend the life using the family as a ladder. Both of us then failed. Now, for myself and Ponni, family is not a ladder to ascend and achieve our wishes. In our case, all other things are like the steps in the ladder only for the ascending of the family. I am using the art also as the steps in that ladder. She lives for me; and I live for her. Our family is the elevated place-the open terrace of a house-where we wishes to go for a pleasant walk. In our aim, there is nothing higher than that; neither do we wish to fly higher than that. Nothing including my education and the art in which I was trained had taught me the truth. All those things acquired by me had stood simply like cataracts which prevented my vision. *When I became, poor and began to live in a hut, the arrogance of my education and the respect of the art began to move away from me; the cataracts also were removed. The basic or the foundation of the life began to be sighted clearly to the eyes; then, the towering objective was also visible to my eyes distinctly. Love and affection form the foundation; sacrifice is the tower of the life. The pleasures and pains in the life are those pictures and sculptures seen in between.* The poor but affectionate woman Ponni's heart has taught me this true education. My little world is the world enough for me. My sweet little world is in that small hut where my beloved Ponni lives. Ponni the 'effulgent light' of my life is there irradiating light around,

which is capable of bearing with my harsh words as well as my fiery anger unmindful of what does her heart desires. I indeed discovered the truth about how great souls like Gandhijee had risen in the life only with the illumination of that effulgent light of their life. A heart which is unwilling and resistant to give itself up as well as its respect and feeling of proudness for the sake of love will be incapable of doing any other sacrifice. All said and done will end as infructuous and wasteful; such relationship will end as spurious and false. In my sweet little world, there is no place for wasteful words; and for false relationship. Our world is such that when the lips move, the heart will also be moved; when tears bubble in the eyes, instantly the heart will also be stirred and perturbed. For me, enough is this sweet little world! I have the peace and consolation required for the life here; I have the pleasure and happiness too. My happy abode is that hut where she lives. When we leave off, we will fly together; when we enter in back, we will do so together. Of course it is a small abode - a modest recluse. But, it is a fully, secured fortress where the climatic changes like the value and respect of the society will not penetrate into. It is enough for me. It is because of this reason, how so ever strongly and forcefully you and your friend-who had come the other day to meet me - may pull me out from this safe abode, I am very much hesitant and unwilling to come out."

There was a sort of satisfaction blossomed in his face. I did not know how the sufferings and tears which was found earlier in his face had vanished. Here after, I need not care and I felt courageous enough to ask him whatever I wanted to ask.

"How was it possible for you to descend from a luxurious state of living to this kind of life of poverty?" I asked.

"It is because of courage. We used to stop and hesitate for sometime before we would get down and bathe in a river or tank. We don't hesitate to step in the water and get our legs wet; we don't hesitate to take water with both the hands and put it in the mouth and gargle. But, we do hesitate only to get down to hip deep water and get the body dipped in water. We never hesitate to talk and write about leading a simple and austere life. Only we do hesitate to lead such an austere life. Why should we hesitate? If we are courageous enough and prepared ourselves for it, then everything will end well. Pick up courage and plunge yourself once in the water, get drenched, then come up and rub your shoulders and chest. See yourself the miraculous change in you. Feeling of cold will fly away; hesitation will leave off. Afterwards you won't be willing to come out of the water" said he.

We had no knowledge about the time passed, and the hour of that day. Sentry guard had changed. One cock cried "cock-a-doo-dle-doo" -

Another cock cried as though answering to the first one. The leaves of the pipal tree were slowly waving in the wind and making their typical sound.

I saw the artist. His eyes were just piercing the darkness and looking at some thing. I told him. "will you please go to sleep?"

"You are also not sleeping!" he said.

"I will also sleep" so saying I just leaned against the wall and myself; folded my hand and put it like a pillow under my head. Artist also lied down. I asked him: "Hadn't you seen Nirmala there after?"

"No. I was under treatment and nearly a month I was in Hospital. She had never come to see me."

"Was she present in the home-town and failed to see you?"

"No. She was not there at the home town. That I know well."

"How did you know?"

"I sent word to my friends. They came and saw me. For the whole month they came to see me daily in the evening without fail, and were talking to me and consoling me. They brought for me whatever I needed. It was they who told me that she was not present at the home town."

"Did you go back to your home?"

"I had no mind to go back to my home. I had no liking nor intention to go back home as a lame man having lost both the legs. I just informed and requested a friend of mine to get my house vacated and take all the furniture and things to his residence and keep it there. He promised to do so and gave me the list of things thus vacated and removed from my home. He is a rich and affluent man. I took a loan of four hundred rupees from him and cleared the balance to be paid for my treatment on account of expenses for medicine. The unfinished drawing i.e. "the picture of the beautiful young lady and the parrot perched on the tree" must be with him in his residence. Did I not tell you earlier that the pictures bought by you in China Bazaar were the 'look-a-likes' of my own creations? 'Four doves looking at the waterfalls', 'The crescent of the twilight sky', 'The pitch-dark-night and the falling rain drops visible in the flashing light of lightning' and 'The refusal of the lady' etc were the pictures taken by my friend along with other things from my home. He had kept it there at his residence. As years had rolled down and as my where about was not known to him I think he must have disposed them. They had been copied down and the Bengal Bazaars had exhausted selling them. Now, their copies had reach Tamil Nadu and shops here have started

to sell them. Let it be a bygone thing. They were the treasure - or properties - of Mohan who was fond of luxurious life. They have no connection with me”.

“Had you quit your native place without the knowledge of your friends?” I asked him to probe further.

“Yes. Had only they were aware of it, they would have virtually prevented me from leaving Calcutta. It would be an unbearable agony for me, after becoming lame to wander around the places of the known town, being unable to walk, just creep on the streets. Besides, if ever she had not been there in our former residence, she would be in her elder brother’s residence or some where else. If I were to remain there, it would be like poison to her respectable life. If ever I happened to see her, my misery and agony would be increased due to my earlier remembrances of earlier days; then I might lose my peace of mind. Therefore, I left the town without informing about it to my friends. Did I not tell you that there was hundred and ten rupees in my purse when I was hit by the speeding car and brought to the Hospital? I took courage to come to over here with that money. On that day my friends came in the evening to see and enquire about my health as usual. When they were parting with me I took their hands and put them in my chest and I kissed every body’s hands while I drenched them with tears. “Why you are so much visibly upset and perturbed? While on all these days you had given a send off gladly why on this day alone you are shedding so much tears?” They asked me. I wept and said “today is my birthday; therefore my mind is not within my control.” They pat upon my back, consoled me, and departed from me”.

His narration came to a stop. Artist wept; he wiped off tears in his eyes. He talked with agitated mind due to agony: “They took leave from me and went away. It was 7 P.M. I had previously made proper arrangement for getting myself discharged from the hospital. I called in for a taxi. They put me in a wheel chair and brought me down through lift. I went near the taxi in the wheel chair and boarded in to the taxi. I went straight to the Railway Junction and got into the Madras – Howrah Mail and reached this place.”

Without going to the next question I waited for his emotion to subside. The clock struck four. “Are you not going to sleep yet?” He himself asked.

“No, How can it be. It is going to dawn” I said.

“Have you come along with me to the cell in order to hear my full story? You have found out an apt way for that!” said he.

"No one can suspect that you belong to other state. At first, I had a doubt on one day. Long before I had forgotten it. Afterwards my friend Kumaresan – who came the other day with me when you took shelter at corporation school - with whom you were talking, found out the fact and told me about you. What he told the other day had become true. How, no one else could find out you as a Bengali?"

"What could I do? I couldn't help it. As I had left my home state I had to give up my mother tongue also. I took great care that even by mistake or slip I should not speak Bengali words. Nearly one and a half year had passed before I could speak Tamil fluently. Till then I had been staying at Washermenpet. I mingled with those poor and deprived class of people as one among them in the choultries at Thiruvottriyur with dirty clothes- rather I got them to be dirty to identify with them. I began to sit before the Temple. Those who passed by were moved by my condition and they dropped coins. When I picked up to speak Tamil fluently they asked about my nativity. I told them that I was a Tamilian and when I was a young boy my parents took me with them to Kasi (Varanasi) on pilgrimage; that they had passed away there itself; and that as I had to stay there for a long time, I could not learn Tamil. Thus, I had been escaping from being identified as to my nativity, by telling lies. As I remained for a very long time without speaking any other language than Tamil, I acquired knowledge to speak Tamil fluently. Only after I acquired a good knowledge in spoken Tamil, I came from that corner of this Chennai City to this end and stayed at the hut of Kundhamma."

Till this sentence, I was following his story attentively. Even beyond that, he was telling something; but I was very much tired and exhausted and sleep began to clutch me. I tried my level best to drive away and prevent sleep, but I could not succeed somehow I slipped into sleeping. What else might the artist have told, I didn't know. I failed to catch them and know them all; I had missed a good opportunity.

When I woke up from deep sleep, it had already dawned to a bright morning. The sun had come up with its heat.

"Some how you have slept! I also slept a while" said the artist.

"Could you realise it? Even in incarceration, the poor man has the pleasure of sleeping! The boon! So, poor has the taste of pleasure, a blessing! Hence, *"Shall we the poor ever have the taste of pleasure!"* -the lyric lines sung by the police man need not be given credit! This pleasure, a blessing and boon gifted to the poor will be with them forever. Saying thus he laughed.

Once a gain we began to undergo the ordeal of waiting for the arrival of the Inspector of Police. He didn't come; the man who came was

Sub-Inspector. As soon as he came he looked upon me intently. I too gazed at him. It was a well acquainted face very close to me somewhere it seemed. All on a sudden he asked: "Are you not Thiruvengkattam?" I too asked him: "Aruldoss?"

Immediately he ordered to open the cell. We were classmates in primary school. We later once met each other after a very long years when we were in high school. There after, only now we happened to meet in person in such state of affairs in this Police Station. He was painted to know the distress that had happened to me. He told that he would do his best to get me out of this difficulty. When we explained to him all the truth, he also looked at the artist with pity and told: "Don't worry, sir! Mistaking you as vagabonds or destitutes they have locked you up the whole night. Sorry! They should not have done that." He added: "There is an officer above me; hence, I will record down as required by law." He noted down the name, occupation etc of us. He also recorded our statements. He also said: "I will do whatever is within my might, so that, most probably this case may not be taken up in the file; I will plead for that. If there was no other alternative, and they take up the case in the file, and summon is served on you, you please come to the court on that day and tell the truth before the court and go. You need not at all worry. Please, in that case, inform me one day earlier. Even if there will be any other appointment, I will come there for your sake. Magistrate is a good man; a man of good sympathy; you can tell the truth. He will give credit to your words". He then sent us off.

Myself and the artist profusely thanked him and departed from there. As soon as we came out of the station entrance, artist showed me something near the drainage and told: "Please look at there the two wrestlers who were seen perched on the nodule of the Rifle and watched by me the whole right." When I gazed upon the spot he showed, I found those two Cockroaches which were seen the previous night are eating some loaf of bread which were thrown by some body after eating a part of it.

We boarded the buses. We travelled in the bus calmly with out talking. My mind thought about his life as a whole. I realised that it appeared to be the life of a saint entirely free from self and avariciousness. That saintly man is drawing pleasure in simplicity. I was reminded of the expression in Thirukkural which runs as "வேண்டாமு அன்ன விழுச்செல்வம்".* When the bus stopped at Tailor's Road stop we got down. While getting down, my mouth automatically recited the Kural. The artist must have intently heard

* Please see the foot note in chapter No 8. in this book (Kural: 363).

my words. As we got down from the bus and stopped for a minute there he looked at me and requested: "Please repeat that once again."

"Which one?" I asked.

You were spelling some words which sounded like freedom from desire, wealth or something".

"Oh, you mean that Thirukkural?"

"I slowly recited it word by word. I also explained the meaning of those words. He listened it with patience. He heaved a sigh. "I do not think there is any other grievance in my life. Having come to this state and settled to live here, having learnt to speak this language, I am worried whether I would pass away before I would read this great book. This is my only grievance at present. He folded his hands. While telling this with melting voice. I took leave of him with out any more words.

13

WHEN I was nearing my home, I saw the peon of the Overseer of the corporation coming opposite to me. "Any news? Did Kumaresan send any word through you?" I asked. "Her mother had sent me; he was injured and admitted in the Hospital" he answered.

"Any accident? Where and when?"

"I am not clear about that. His mother told me to inform you, to come straight to the Hospital. That was why I went to your home. But you were not there" he said.

"Which Hospital?"

"Govt. General Hospital."

"Alright. I will start there instantly. You can go." As I told this he moved away. Immediately I recalled something and I asked him to 'come along with me' and I took him with me up to my house, wrote a leave letter addressed to my office and gave it to him with a word to deliver it at my office.

My wife saw my face grief stricken; without speaking any word she was attending to her daily chore, all along looking at me. When I changed dress and was about to start she intervened: 'I've just prepared breakfast; if only you could have it before you leave.....' she was saying. I stopped her to tell; "No, not need; I will have it there afterwards." Saying so, I came out.

I saw my friend in the Hospital with bandages in his legs and back. Then I was reminded of the scene which the artist narrated about his own experience at the Hospital in Calcutta. I went near my friend. Before I could open my mouth to talk, my friend's mother who was standing there wept and shed lot of tears; that silenced me.

My friend just tried to turn his head slowly and look at me. I myself moved to stand in his direct views.

In a very low voice, with pain, he asked: "Did you come to know about it now only?"

"Yes" I said.

"I sent word to my mother yesterday evening itself." He said.

There was neither agitation nor agony to be viewed in his face. Even at the sight of his mother's tears his eyes did not perturb. Whether such emotional expression would have happened and finished yesterday itself, or, even yesterday too, whether my friend remained calm and unperturbed in the heart, seeing his mother caught up in emotions and agony I didn't know. I saw a book kept at the side of his head. It was **Maxim Gorky's 'Mother'**.

"How did you get involved in such an accident? I asked.

He shrank his face and answered in a low voice, word by word with brief pause now and then. "The day before the previous day I was returning back after taking class for workers in a place nearly CTF factory. It was 8 o'clock in the night; two miscreants who were brutes came near me and beat me blue and black. One of them charged at my knee with a strong cudgel. Knee just broke and yielded with a sound "M bluck". I fell down. The moment I fell down another man beat at my back. Thereafter I lost my consciousness. I was in a low pit near by a bush. I could not move myself. It was inexplicable pain. I was shivering all over the body. There was blood stains. I was crying and shouting with harrowing agony. Some body who passed by after the dawn noticed me. People flocked together there. Some of the workers came to know about it. They brought me and got me admitted here." Said he. Often he was expressing painfulness in his face.

Did you have still so much of pain left?"

"Oh, a lot of pain! Killing me! I can't explain! If it is some one else, he will not speak; he will cry and shout. It is pining deeply in the back as though I am being drilled with a needle" he said.

"His mother intervened and said "Doctors have given strict instruction that he should not exert to talk."

"Let it be. It is to me, consoling as well as a bit of relief only if I speak" he said.

"Consoling is not the immediate necessity; you shall recover. That's very important.

Therefore please don't talk" I said.

Again I myself led him to give room for talking.

"Have you any money with you? Whether those cowardice were intending to way lay you, for the money?"

"No, no. I was just having two rupees in the shirt pocket. It was left as such us touched."

"Who else could have done it?"

"Undoubtedly C.T.F musclemen. Who else could it be?"

"Professor had told then itself; but, you have not paid heed to his words."

"Do not tell like that. Great intellectuals like him do not pay heed to our words. If only he would have listened to us, such incidents will never occur" thus he spoke in a manner as though he had lost all his emotions.

A nurse came and told him "Sir, please don't talk." She turned to me and said: "Who are you? You have seen him? Then, please move away; don't induce him to talk."

I stood there simply looking at him. My friend began to talk. I signaled him not to talk with my forefinger on my closed lips.

"All right, Let it be. A few words. I don't know, whether I would live for another day."

I still kept quiet.

He said: "We should not allow the flock of deers and dholes to live together in the society."

"No. know this that none among men are like dholes when they are born. "Said I.

"The deer first accumulates wealth; then, once it has tasted the pomp of wealth and privileges, the very same deer metamorpholizes into dhole and it begins to suck the blood of other deers, and relish upon it" he said.

"Revered great men and sages of yore had preached through their prose and poetry that '*avariciousness has to be shunned*' and '*accumulation of wealth shall not be resorted to*'."

"Those poetry and pose will have no use. Promulgate and ordinance to give effect to those preaching. A lot of didactic literature has been produced. The world has not mended it self."

His mother now looked at me and pleaded to persuade him not to speak.

"Please. Do not effort to speak. Here after this kind of service is not at all needed. Can we reform the world?"

"Can we? Do you ask me, whether we can do it? Are you not asking this, eventhough you are aware of it?"

He is not going to yield, whatever is said, I thought. Hence, I kept silence.

"They would have thought that here after I would remain tamed and submissive; would I ever yield myself and be submissive? No, not. "He said thus in a very low voice as though he was speaking to himself. After a while he again look at me and said: "They have a custom of removing the virility of oxen. Are you aware of it?"

"I know. They call it castration. Is it not?"

Yes it is that. If it is resorted to be performed in the case of poor people as a whole this service of mine may die down."

"Of what use will it be? Removal of virility may lead to stopping of giving birth to children in the families. But, if in the families of rich people as a class, supposing there are seven or eight children born to them, then five or six among them will become poor; and again the population of poor people as a class will multiply."

"Not that; I did not refer to it. Just as the virility of the oxen is curtailed, the growth of the brain of the poor people should be curbed. Some sort of injection should be invented for this purpose and used on a mass scale. Then only this service could be stopped" he said.

"Earlier, poor people were not born with brain; there fore this nuisance was not prevalent then."

"Poor people were on earlier days like the domesticated cattle engaged on labour; therefore their brain did not grow. Now, machines are in their place to work. The poor peoples labour has been considerably reduced. Hence their brain is growing. Hereafter you can't subjugate them."

"Will you please remain quiet?"

"My brain is working; it is not at rest – what can I do? Or else, you please sing the song of Bharathi.* *"On providing food for all, no single hand shall be deprived! **"* please sing that song! I will listen to it and keep quiet. To – day in the early morning I happened to hear a boy who passed by, singing a song from Bharathi which runs thus:

Neither poor nor servitude's will as a class exist;

In Bharat, There's no place for those as a class to be demeaned."
On hearing that song I was enthralled! said he.

Doctors and nurses were coming on rounds in the next hall. I told this to my friend: "I will move away; then only you will keep quiet."

"I have a doubt; whether I will be able to walk as usual again, or not, I don't know. I thought of the lame artist. How is he? Have you gone there to see him? He was a greatman, you know! I presume he is not a Tamilian. Once I shall come there again and see him and talk to him."

"He was really a big man once, indeed. I will come again and tell about him. Shall I take leave of you now?" saying this I came out.

At the moment I came out of the Hospital my eyes sighted a car with the Reg No: 7775

I was repeatedly looking back this side and that side to find out whether the professor had come there. Professor's driver Sekaran came towards me. I asked him: "Has the professor gone inside to see Kumaresan?"

"No. Sir. He is at home. He instructed me to bring you there. I went to your residence at Amaindhakarai. Amma said that you have gone to General Hospital. I was just entering and coming to see you. By that time I have come you across" he said.

* Subramania Bharathi @ Bharathiyar 1881 - 1921 was a great patriotic poet, writer, thinker and philosopher of yester years. Apart from the Freedom Movement his contribution to Tamil Renaissance was immense. A Contemporary and close associate of Thiru V.O.Chidambaram Pillai who was hailed as Thilak of South India. (Pl. see the foot note in Page 2)

** Quoted lines are translated and presented as follows:
"We will frame a rule, of radical effect, this hour;
That, henceforth we will abide by it for ever,
On providing food for all, no single hand shall be deprived!
If the rule is broken, then the whole earth will be destroyed!"

"Any news? Anything urgent?"

"Please be seated. I will tell you." So saying he went near the car and opened the door. I got into the car and seated in it.

He told: "Madam who left the home yesterday night has not yet returned,"

"Then...?"

"It seems that madam has written a very lengthy letter and had left the home. Only after sighting it and going through it, Ayya instructed me to go and meet and bring you there."

"There after?"

"Who knows about the personal affairs big circle? The madam was a peculiar type of person. She has a separate room; and a lot of privacy allowed to lead a separate life. Even Ayya (Professor) cannot enter that room. He had given her so much freedom as she desired. Now he is much worried."

"Was there any quarrel between them?"

Not at all. Nothing like that. I'm well aware of their dispositions. When will a picque begin? Only when one of the two wants to intervene in and overwhelm with the affairs of others? Even the shadow of one will not fall on the other in that house. Then, how can a quarrel arise between them?"

"Yes, yes. It is you who has to take them both in the car, to the places where they wished to go."

Yesterday evening Amma remained at home. I took Ayya in the car. Yesterday was told to be the "Gandhi Jayanti" the birth day of Gandhijee. There was a very big dinner arranged with all attendant fanfare. Except beer and brandy all other items were served. There was also a dance performance. It was a very big function with excitement and tumult. After the Gandhi Jayanthi function programme all were over, it was nearly 11 O'clock late night. When we reached home Amma was not here. Then Ayya was not bothered about anything. He sent me away instructing me to come again the next morning.

What must have been written by her in that letter?"

"Where could she have gone, without a word about it? What must be the reason behind it? Nothing could be inferred."

The Driver said: "The reason is not known. But, for two or three days, I have been watching her, her face was seen painfully withered. That alone I have noticed."

"Was it any grief or sadness? Was she not feeling well?"

"Of course, she was not feeling well. Three days earlier he asked me to drive to China Bazaar. I took her there. She asked me to stop it before the High Court. I stopped there. There was a large crowd gathered near Parry's Corner. She asked me to get still closer to that crowd. I took the car closer to the crowd. There, a lame man used to draw pictures with charcoal. I got down from the car and went near him and saw it, Madam as also looking at it while seated in the car. I heard her calling me "Driver". I turned back and saw madam closing her eyes with her hand and her head bent down. "What madam?" I asked she said "I am feeling giddiness; you please take the car and drive straight to home. While I was driving back to home I just turned back and saw the madam with her head hung down for a long time."

"Then what?"

"Even after reaching back home, she was feeling giddiness it seemed; she did not talk to anybody. She was said to be alone and aloof in her private room, bolted from inside. Even after professor returned home, she did not come out. Day before yesterday. She has been to Kilpauk to see somebody who hailed from Bombay was sick and ailing; while we were driving along the school premises there, she cried "Ah", I halted the vehicle applying sudden brake. Those poor folks who were displaced from their slum due to floods and who had taken shelter in the school surround the car. Then I drove the car for some distance away from there and asked her "Madam, what are ailing from?" "She replied: "All on a sudden I got acute pain in stomach" I suggested her that our doctor's residence is in that vicinity; we will straight drive there." But, she instructed me to drive straight to Thiruvallikeni. On that day also she reached home she was writhing with agony and painfulness due to stomach pain. If only she had taken some doses of medicine, it could not have become chronic thus. On that day also she was....."

Even before he stopped his words I asked him: "what was the name of the Madam? I have forgotten."

He answered me. "Nirmala Devi."

On hearing this name, there were hundreds of thousands of lightnings flashing with in my brain in clusters. Several of the labyrinth of

paths in my thinking so far remained in darkness have all on a sudden got illuminated. Forgetting my self I was gazing and gazing on some thing.

“Please get down,sir” said Sekaran, the driver, who stood in front of me after opening the door for me to alight.

WHEN the professor saw me, he spoke to me pacifyingly: "What Mr. Thiruvengkattam? Are you much bewildered and perturbed by this? Your face expresses that you are awe-struck; did the driver tell you? Nothing to worry. It was just to see you and to have a chat with you, I sent word to bring you here".

"No, Uh. nothing sir" I just tried to tell him some thing but words came out incoherently.

"I remain undisturbed; but why, you seem to be much worried thus! Look here, a letter written by her; she has poured in what all that she wanted to inform in detail, before she departed. She will be back in another two months. Please sit down" he said.

I sat down.

He called the servant and told him to bring tiffin and tea. Actually I was hungry, as I had not taken breakfast at home when I started. But I was keeping quiet. However, I thought how this professor is so hard-hearted. I presumed that he must not be knowing the real reason and even if he knew it he must not be having so much affection as to be distressed and pained at her action.

"She should have informed me before she left. Some sort of cowardly mind" so said the professor.

Tiffin plates came in. I took tiffin to satiate my appetite. There were many turbulent thoughts rocking my mind. I was very much hesitant, to tell as to how those could be revealed. Without knowing anything, particularly without knowing the contents of the letter would it be appropriate to tell him anything? - I thought thus and hence, I just rolled all those rumbling ideas and thoughts, packed up and sealed them in my heart. I also had tea.

Professor spoke: "Still your face is not cleared of those clouds of confusion! This set back is because of your youth. You should read books on philosophy. Your mind should not be allowed to be so soft and fragile. If you are much bewildered for the distress of others, what will be your agony when you face your own?"

"Nothing like that, sir" I said.

He gave me the letter in my hand and asked me: "You read it; read it peacefully without being perturbed; give considerable gap and pause for each sentence; you are a young gentleman; you have to know a lot."

I received the letter in my hand; it was very heavy. It appeared like a lengthy essay; A good number of pages have been written. I opened the letter; I just read a few lines in the first page to my self within my mind.

Professor said: "It is not enough if you read it for yourself. You read it aloud so that I also hear it. I have to explain you several pieces of information. Hence, read it slowly."

I read it, as he desired.

"My Dear Husband,

Vanakkam. (pranams).

I, first of all, myself did not like to depart in this manner. But, I have no other go than this to give vent to, and get rid of the painful agony in my heart. I repeatedly thought of this for the past three days. I could not sight any other alternative. Therefore, I hope that you will kindly pardon me.

I should have remained at home and told it to you; that would have been appropriate. It is also the duty of a wife who adores her husband. I am thoroughly aware of it. But, I have no courage to reveal it to you in person. On some occasion I gathered courage to do so. But, I had no hope, that because of my explaining it to you in person my agony would subside.

You have given me a lot of freedom and have treated me with utmost kindness. I am grateful to you and bounden to you for my whole life. The rights you had conceded to me, and the affection you had extended to me will be there in my mind indelible even in my deathbed. When you have adored me and hailed me, awarding so much of rights to me, you shall kindly grant permission to me for committing this wrong too. I know you would grant me this right even without being asked for by me. I had the great blessing of knowing every day the magnanimity of yours, by living together with you and closely associating with you. Nobody else had been blessed

with this boon but only me. – Which, I am proud to think of it. Therefore, I would like to request you one thing. If it appears to you, that my departure from there, without even taking leave from you, is an uncivilized mistake, then you please forgive me. If it appears to you that it is an unpardonable and grave mistake you at least read this letter till the last and then you kindly forgive me. With that, my connection with you will cease to exist; but I will never forget you. I will hail you and praise you; I will worship you in my heart till my last breath.

If only some five years back some woman had written like this I would have ridiculed her as insane. Even if I had written like this, my friends would not have believed it; my behaviour then, was altogether a different one. Those were days when I had the belief that adoring in the heart, worshipping, forgetting not even when forgotten – were all meaningless empty words. I was thinking that the chastity of olden days was some thing like the civilization of Eskimos of Arctic Region.

The cosmopolitan life of Calcutta City – in general, life at any of the big cities – was not conducive to, nor emphasize the greatness of chastity in the minds of woman. I was a girl born and brought up in Calcutta; in an atmosphere of pomp and luxury of that city; studied in a big college which hails and adores the western culture; and was always in the company of woman who were after fashions and styles and who never knew the greatness of morality. Therefore, I did not know in those days, about the culture which would make oneself be subjugated to affection and love.”

Here, I stopped because the professor intervened to speak. I listened to him. “I do not believe in her words that she had been like that once upon a time. I met her for the first time only when I went to Mumbai some four years back. She had written about that in this letter itself. When I met her in Mumbai I saw her possessing all virtues such as modesty, like all other good women hailing from Tamil Nadu. “On my first meeting with her, I was amazed to see that even in North India the educated women are possessed with good conduct, morality and objectives like our Tamil women. This was the foremost reason, I will tell you, for my attraction towards her.

Now, when I see what she has written now, I can not believe it to be true. All right, you read further" said he. I continued to read it.

"If at all I am quite tamed and reformed now, the first reason can be adduced to my friendship with Mrs. Senthamarai, who took me endearingly to her heart as her own younger sister. The second reason was "Thirukkural" which was taught to me by her. The third reason is your relationship. If I had not been blessed with the friendship of Senthamarai earlier, I would not even have touched with respect the sacred book 'Thirukkural'. Had I not read Thirukkural and showered my affection and reverence on it, I would not have turned up to hear your lecture at Mumbai. It was true indeed that I had been reformed then itself with my association with Senthamari and by learning of Thirukkural. But, the good character acquired by my reformation could have been reversed quickly. Is it not a fact? Only good things we shed off hastily. The reason why good character acquired by me had not reversed but rooted in me permanently was your good relationship. If only I had not got your relationship my craze for old Luxury life of Cosmopolitan Calcutta would have returned and changed me as before."

This particular portion was not clearly understandable to me; hence, I faltered and read it slowly. I looked up at the face of the Professor. He was listening to me, with his head bent and nodding. Then, he at once raised his head and looked at me and said: "Did you see the fact? This was why, I asked you to read it aloud; some of the facts are well known only to me. If others read it they cannot understand it. I alone can explain them". Then he added: "Do you know who is that lady by name Senthamarai? Do you know Thirunathan who is the proprietor of 'Madhavi Printers' at Thyagaraya Nagar? His sister- own sister- is Senthamarai. Her husband Ilango was my classmate. He was an officer in a senior position at A.G.'s Office at Calcutta. He was transferred to Bombay and the family is still at Bombay. Whenever I go to Bombay I used to stay with that family. Only because of the interest evinced by them, the Bombay Tamil Sangam invited me to Bombay. As per their request I went to Bombay, stayed there and I conducted classes on Thirukkural at Matunga for a whole month. Besides, every Sunday I also gave lectures in English on Thirukkural. When that Tamil Family was in Calcutta they had closely associated with the family of Nirmala. Nirmala was then reading in B.A. Class. Both their families were put up in one and the same building upstairs; one was residing at the northern portion the

other was at the southern portion. Therefore, Nirmala was well known to Senthamari. Ilango also knew her. Senthamarai is a well read lady. She is cultured and civilized. She is very active with a high sense of duty. She is thorough in her knowledge on Tamil Literature particularly 'Silapathikaram'. Ilango also is a good man. She leads a well disciplined life, with great ability. Both the husband and wife will not fail to read at least a chapter from Thirukkural daily. They consider and regard Thirukkural as their life. Thus, Nirmala had cultivated good relationship with this good family while at Calcutta. After Ilango was transferred to Bombay their contact had stopped. When Nirmala came to Bombay, Ilango, with his influence, put a word with his circle of acquaintances and got her a teacher job in a school. Only when she was working as a teacher in Bombay I went there for giving lectures. You know that on a summer vacation I happened to stay there for six weeks. On that occasion I happened to see Nirmala everyday. I would meet her in Kural classes; or else, I would meet her when she came to attend the lecture amidst a large gathering. If I missed to meet her on both these places, and I went to Ilango's residence, there I would see her talking with Senthamarai. If at all I missed to meet her, I would also feel that I was missing something. She would also make it convenient for her to meet me somehow or other. A beautiful structure; a face irradiating knowledge, along with that, she was a lady known to Senthamarai from her girlhood. For these reasons, I was attracted towards Nirmala, without my knowledge. There were some ladies who fancied me. But, I had never felt this sort of attraction towards them. I had gone to meet them; tried to get associated with them. All these had happend. But, my mind never had an inclination towards them; it always kept some distance away from them. I got away from them with an apprehension, about the character of those women - whether they were genuinely good or not. Thus, all the possible contexts which could have created chances to get a lover had been avoided. But, because Nirmala was a girl who had closely moved with Senthamarai, such doubts did not occur to me in her case. The fact that a Bengali woman had evinced so much interest in Thirukkural had actually nurtured my affection towards her. She also did neither hesitate nor keep off from me; but she actually moved with me closely with modesty and humility. That itself had promoted my affection towards her as love in her - I should say. That was why, during Christmas holidays in the next December, I did not venture out to go anywhere else but to Bombay. Thereafter, we both exchanged our love through correspondence and the idea to get married with her had indeed grown up. Only in order to see her, I went there in the next summer holiday too. When I went there I stayed with her in her quarters. Ilango and Senthamarai, invited us as though they were inviting a newly wedded couple and they gave us a grand dinner. Thereafter, I asked her to give up her teaching job

and brought her with me here. This was all the story of the early chapter of our life together. Now, I think that almost every thing will be clear to you."

"Yes, Sir" I nodded my head and began to read further. He just started telling "I want to add one more thing" and stopped. "Craze for luxury, nature of giving least respect to morality, heart which considers chastity as an antiquated thing, and a host of others abounded in her - she confesses so herself in this letter. May be it must have been true. Since the day I began to move with her till this date, I never saw any of these qualities in her even on a single occasion. On the other hand, there were occasions when I thought about her that she had been so conservative. She would not eat before I ate. When I entered home she would stand up and receive me. In the morning she would wake up before me. She would wait at me to serve as a maid. Seeing all these things I had occasions to think about her that she was not a modern woman but she was very mad after conservatism. I also thought that perhaps, because she had attended my Thirukkural classes in Bombay and had behaved like my student, this humility, obedience, and willingness to run-on-errands must have come to her. Therefore, I could not believe that in her earlier life, she must have been like the one she had confessed in this letter. But before we began our life together, she asked for two promises from me. One was, that we should live together as wedded couple without insisting for solemnizing in the marriage. The other one was, that a separate room should be given for her and anything inside there should not be probed into on any occasion and on whatever grounds it might be. Only when she asked from me these two promises I realised that she too was having a progressive mind. I gave her those two promises and till now I have behaved well conforming to my promises without fail".

On hearing this, I was surprised to know that they were living together without getting married till date. I read further.

"The very same Senthamarai who had refined and reformed my life is the cause for my mental worry that I am undergoing at present. The very same Thirukkural-the manual of ethical codes - which revealed to me many of the truths about life, is the cause for making my heart burn me now. The very same relationship with you, which actually made me settle in a good family life is the cause for running away from home without even taking leave of you. Do not think that I am writing something impertinent. I do write only the truth.

I had committed a grave mistake- a blunder in life. There are many people who are actually committing

mistakes in life like me. But I had never seen any of them caught up in concern and worry like me. I had moved with a lot of women from various states. I had also mingled and associated with those women who had committed mistakes and was also aware of their state of mind.

“Men can not live without lapses and shortfalls. All do commit mistakes; then why not I too commit the same?” Saying thus some get pacified for their action. “Is there any thing called vices and virtues? Good and bad, blessing and sin etc are all imagination of men. We shall not have any worry in life; even if we encounter worries we shall not be worried about it; we shall get engaged in recreations which entertains the mind and live happily. We shall get rid of the worry and weariness even if by engaging our selves in Horse-race etc which shall enthrall the heart. We shall not look into analysing things as mistakes and sins, become coward and get into displeasure and suffering”. I have seen some women folk, saying thus, were wandering with arrogance. I was among the former type of people. If only I had no chance to come across to hear about and read Thirukkural I would have gone from bad to worse. I would have gone from the first stage to the second stage and wandered with those arrogant women’s group. Thirukkural has softened me and made me a reticent woman. It did not allow me to wander with arrogance; even though I had committed a mistake. Instead, it has made me think about my mistake, feel sorry for that, and regret the mistake committed by me. It actually induces and encourages me to lead a good life without committing any mistake. It also promotes the good habit i.e., to brood over and think and keep aloof from others. In those days whenever I happened to remain alone and away from company, I will while away the time thinking about other ladies and gents who were gazing at me. Nowadays, whenever I happen to be alone, thinking about me only overwhelms. Thought swells up over and over about myself, my virtues and vices, my shortfalls and accomplishments and they try to reform me. When you were giving a series of lectures on Thirukkural under the auspices of Bombay Tamil Sangam at Matunga, on one day you spoke on the couplet as follows:

தன்னெஞ்சறிவது பொய்யற்க பொய்த்தபின்
தன்னெஞ்சே தன்னைச் சுடும்.*

While explaining it vividly you compared the life histories of Tolstoy and Gandhiji with those of dictators and despots. A wonderful speech that was, that I clearly remember it still to-day. In fact, it is still resounding in my ears. Everyday, I am finding it to be true in my life. My heart which had once become morbid has now become sensitized to feel the harsh challenge of my conscience. It is almost like reshooting by a dead wood. If only I were in my previous state of mind, I would have never bothered to rethink about my fault, out of guilty consciousness. With the magical touch of Thirukkural and the changes it brought into me, the mistake once committed is again and again coming in my memory. Therefore, I have to put the blame for my misery upon Thirukkural.

On some occasions I used to blame you too, while I think about you. You informed me that you wanted to marry me. You yourself asked me whether there were any conditions on my part to marry you. I told you my two conditions. One: Marriage ceremony of any type – whether it be performed in a marriage hall or it be solemnized in a Registration Office, should not be there; We both could live as married couples. When I told this first condition of mine you readily agreed to it without hesitation. You never asked “why?” If only you had asked why, I would have spoken to you and revealed what was in the bottom of my heart- the grave offence – or guilt of mine. Even if perhaps you had asked it why, but I did not answer it and reveal it - being an eminent professor of psychology, you yourself could have thought over it and found out. At least to give respect to the greatness of your position, you should have considered over it and refused to accept my condition saying that it was absolutely impossible to lead life as couples without getting married. Even then I would not have given up your claim to my hands totally. Then at least, my grave

* *Let not a man knowingly tell a lie; for after he has told the lie, his mind will burn him (with the memory of his guilt).*

(Translation: DREW and LAZARUS)

offence which had been a hurdle to perform our marriage could have been exposed. Law would not give room for that. This fact could have come out from me then. You could have nipped the thorny plant in the bud itself. It did not happen so, because, you had agreed to my first condition without any hesitation. The offender could not admit her guilt and there by relieved of the scar – and become a person of clear conscience; she had to live on in darkness hiding herself, as an offender for ever in her conscience.

Then I put forth my second condition which insisted that there should be a private room, exclusive by for me; I also told you that no one including yourself should ever open that room, enter or intervene there on any occasion. You graciously agreed for this too. Even if, at least, you had disagreed to this second condition you could have come to know of my 'disturbed mind' then itself. Or else, when we were living together- at least on a single occasion – you could have contravened the condition. You could have crossed my jurisdiction, entered in to that room, intervened in my privacy, and found out what my guilt was and what I had hidden from you. If you had tried and found out then, at least a part of my guilt would have been exposed. But, from the day we started to live together, till this date, you had never peeped into my room; never tried to see what was in side; and never once you had doubted and asked about. Whether it was possible for any man other than you, to allow so much of rights to his wife with so much magnanimity, and also behave without prejudice is doubtful. I blame this magnanimity of yours. You kept simply quiet; you were like a physician who conceded to the request of the patient, who just saw and never touched the abscess in his back and moved away. Because of this, the abscess enlarged, became gangrenous and it had advanced to a stage whereby it would be going to kill the patient. Alas! Could not the physician by ignoring her request, have operated and removed the abscess then itself and cured her! – thus the patient is crying now.

I have to blame Senthamarai all the more than, I would blame you and Thirukkural. Because, it was

Senthamarai who told me to put forth the first condition. In that direction shown by her I myself had thought over and added the second condition. When that lady told me to impose the first condition I refused to oblige. I told her, that how could I tell this as a condition to such a good person and such a great man of truthfulness and sincerity; it won't be possible; and it won't be befitting for a person like me who had showered so much affection on him." Senthamarai insisted me: "you shall impose such a condition. Otherwise, your life will be spoilt. From my personal knowledge, I will tell you how the life of many women had fallen. You please listen to me. I have more affection towards Mr. Kamalakkannan than I have towards you. His friendship is older than yours with our family. It is a good old friendship grown over years. You and I were residing in Calcutta in one the same house but in different portions and got acquainted to each other. But Kamalakkannan and my husband were classmates starting from schooldays and they were thick friends. You and I belong to different States; our mother tongues are different; but we belong to the same State; we have the same mother tongue. Therefore, if there is anything detrimental to him, posing hardship to him, I will be the first person to be stirred up against it; Therefore, it is in seeking good for him as well as you, I am telling this. You listen to me and accept my advice. Don't spoil your life. You just impose the condition and obtain promise from him. The mental attitude of the men from Tamil Nadu is entirely different from others. You do not think about them as you would do about men from other states. Generally when the men are in search of the hand of a girl to make her as wife, they would usually be in search of a maiden with pure chastity. I think men from Tamil Nadu are more conservative than others in this aspect. I used to tell this as a superstition. My husband who talks and advocates reforms himself, for a long time did not agree with my view. Now, after he has been matured by experience, and ripe with affection, and after his policy of reformation — that it was inappropriate to lay down two different set of rules; one for men and the other for women — did not stop as mere lip service; but it went to stay in the heart, my husband agreed to my view in this regard. Take this

case for example: a girl was married to a boy; they led a very happy life with love and affection; they both had given birth to two or three children. By this time, the husband had come across with an information which told about her earlier relationship with some other man. He at once hated his wife; got dejected life. Kept away from her. He took the decision to desert her and renounce the family life. There are many examples which were happening like this in Tamil Nadu. The story even goes to the extreme in which some families fell prey to murderous instincts and got destroyed. I know pretty well that Kamalakkannan is a man of very great progressive ideas. But, don't forget that in his body it is the Tamil blood is which flowing. As there are a number of good things in the Tamil Culture and Civilisation, there are also one or two drawbacks. Consider this as one among them. Don't think that I am finding fault with the culture of my homeland. I will always consider about good things; now for the sake of your good, I consider the bad things too and am telling you about it. We cannot believe in Kamalakkannan just because, he is a great reformist and confide this with him. Our literature tells that if a woman becomes the object of desire to a stranger, even if she has not committed any mistake, her chastity becomes less in merit. We used to hail and adore the chastity of a woman who would not be the object of desire to the heart of a stranger. Kamalakkannan is a man of progressive ideas. Therefore, on hearing this he would laugh at. How can this be possible? - He will ridicule, telling that such a chastity for a woman would be possible only when you cover the windows of the house with curtains and make the woman sit down in the corner of the house.

He will also mock at this idea, telling "Oh! If the girl comes out of the house to the court yard to draw decorative design ("Kolam") on the floor in the street, or if she goes to her mother's house in the day time; if any stranger happened to look at her, and if her figure enters into his mind, her chastity is lost!" However, I tell you, the minds of men, that too particularly the minds of men from Tamil Nadu could not be confided into in this regard! Therefore, do not tell the truth! You ask for his promise

for this condition". Thus she gave me a very lengthy narration of preaching and insisted me. Therefore I put forth the condition and asked for your promise. You indeed granted me that promise. Now my mind is suffering a lot. The guilt which was hidden, has now become cause for my misery. Therefore, I also blame Senthamarai".

I thought how painful would be his mind if he would also come to know the fact about her that she had lived with her first husband; I just gave a pause to reading and looked at his face. He looked at me and asked: "Do you think that I would be so conservative? Do you believe that I would have such superstition ? I said "No sir."

Why did Senthamarai have such an opinion about me? I don't know. Always women folk will have some amount of doubt and disbelief upon men, it seems." said he. Again, he continued further: "To speak the truth I am very progressive in this aspect. I realised that Nirmala must have had relationship with men earlier. You know basically I am a psychologist. Could I not realise that? But, I was not bothered about that. She is sincere, virtuous, with morality and chastity when she lives with me. That is enough. They define chastity as a sincere and truthful life led as "one woman with one man' throughout their lives. That must have been more appropriate for the ancient times. In olden days there were only development of handicrafts. Then, men and women had the well laid path of life to lead in a particular direction, and also faith in that which were sound; hence, it was easy to lead a life as "one woman with one man". In these days, mechanisation of industries has grown up very rapidly. These are the days of experiment and enjoyment in abundant scale. Therefore it may so happen that a woman leaves a man to go and get united with another man. It would be wrong only when she would go to live with another man without leaving the previous man who was her husband. It would be enough if she would not commit treachery to the man with whom she lived at a time. That is chastity. This kind of integrity is hailed as chastity in America. In our country this concept is accepted to as far as men are concerned. The very same concept is never applicable to and acceptable in the case of women. This itself is an evidence that "bondage of womanhood" is still in vogue here. Take the cases of celebrities among men in the part for analysis. Arunagiriyar was a great poet-saint who had sung hundreds of devotional songs in praise of Lord Muruga (Skanda). Early part of his life was not quite palatable to read or hear; full of incidents of bad taste. But, later, he repented for it, lead a saintly life, becoming staunch devotee of Lord Muruga. The story goes that he had also demonstrated certain miracles. We respect and revere him and worship him as great personality. In the same manner, in America, Even though there

were certain flaws and shortfalls in the early part of the life of women, if they lead a virtuous life later in a well defined path, they praise their chastity."

I now thought of my wife Nagu. Even if she happened to hear this story she would feel it as ugly and nauseating. She would dislike and hate with a sense of vomiting instantly. Immediately, all her feelings of respect towards the professor would vanish. Thereafter, she would go to the extreme of treating the professor and an immoral rogue alike. I thought in my mind about the firm belief of those women who belong to the middle class who were educated but had not got any degree, and also the menfolk around them and close to them. Then I began to read further.

"I had told you a lot about my parents and their background, my childhood days, how I was brought up, my education and customs and manners. But, I had not told you the entire history. I had told you all the good parts of them, which would not bring blemish to my name. I had not narrated those portions, which were the ills and scars on my life. You should kindly excuse me for that. As Thiruvalluvar said: "Of what use will it be by an out ward appearance of a person which is tall and impressive?*" some day or other the black part of the red berry (Kunril)** mind suffering of conscious sin" would be exposed. Still some more time I might be able to hide that black part without being sighted by your eyes. But, having read Thirukkural, my conscience has grown up and got refined. My conscience is inducing me not to hide it from you who love me from the unison of our hearts. Therefore, without hiding any part of it, I would write it down.

You know pretty well that my father was an ordinary merchant. He did not know what was art and education. I had told you often about my mother. Because of her, I could get education. After the completion of my education she herself felt a lot about it. You will ask why.

* வான் உயர் தோற்றம் எவன் செய்யும் தன் நெஞ்சம்
தான் அறி குற்றப் படின (குறள் 272)

** புறங்குன்றி கண்டனையரேனும் அகங்குன்றி
மூக்கில் கரியார் உடைத்து (குறள் 277)

Translation By Drew & Lazarus - "What avails an appearance (of sanctity) high as heaven, if the mind suffer (the indulgence) of conscious sin (Kural 1 : 28:2)
The world contains persons whose outside appears (as fair) as the red berry of the Abrus (Kunril); but whose inside is as black as the nose of that berry (Kural 1:28:7)

Her desire was to select a bridegroom for me in the circle of our relatives themselves. She tried very hard. The educated young men among our relatives, went out of the circle, selected brides from rich families, got married and received lot of money and property as dowry. We had no such wealth and property in our family and, hence, the educated grooms did not come forward to take my hand. Only uneducated grooms came seeking my hand. My mother refused to give away me to such grooms; my father had been thinking that I should be married away to one of such grooms. But my mother did not agree to it. Therefore, the resultant bitterness of this disagreement between my mother and father lasted for a long time. At last they decide to marry me to a boy outside the circle of our relatives. Then, father being a believer in matching based on horoscope, he repeatedly compared those horoscopes of bride grooms which came then, with mine; and finding out flaws in the matching, he rejected many of them.

The dislike towards the horoscopes and the dejection, which arose due to them during those days, became the base for the total change of my life. The hatred and aversion towards it later developed in me as dislike and rejection on old customs and traditions and beliefs. It went to the extent of hating even the good among the old; on the other hand, I blindly accepted all those in the new and modern thoughts and deeds. I went one step ahead that I could not even like those who adore and abide by old thinking. My mind accepted even ills and evils presented in the name of modernity. Girls who would ridicule, condemn and mock at concepts like good fortune, misfortune, virtues, and values, 'Dharma' and justice etc, had become my bosom friends. The trend, which started by my hatred towards horoscope, thus led me to new and pompous life which was blindly followed, more than the old superstitious beliefs.

At that time I got the friendship of an artist. How I acquired his friendship was a funny story. A girl by name Madhuri who hailed from his native place was learning the art of drawing in the school of arts. She would

be often visiting our Modern Women's Club. When I got her acquaintance there I developed a liking in the art of drawing. Even though I had not joined to learn the art, I gained some knowledge in that art. Madhuri was the reason for that. That artist was her lover then. He was commanding good respect in the youth circle in Calcutta at that time, having good reception and influence among women. If only he had the skill and ability to convert his proficiency in the art into money-spinning business, he would have been one of the leading rich men in Calcutta to-day. But he would neither approach the merchants; nor would he respect and recognise them if they volunteered to approach him for that. "I am not a man who sells his art for money" – he would claim with arrogance. Some of these merchants had become his enemies – it might be said. If they cultivated enmity, rich people and merchants would not come out with their hostility openly; they would never expose it. They began their anti – propaganda against his creations – belittling his drawings. That propaganda slowly spread everywhere and it truly created a belief among all, that he was an artist of lessor merit, which led to losing the support of people. But, his art had acquired a very good name and respect among his friends. How long would this good respect last without diminishing? Generally people had a gift of forgetfulness. That too, in this world which functions very hurriedly, no one would keep track of any thing for a long time.

You yourself had told me once that the hustle-and-bustle in our day to-day life of tensions made us to forget even great leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and V.O.Chidambaram Pillai who were veteran freedom fighters and great leaders of all time. That was truly said. Since the artist neglected those merchants and the publicity alike, wealth as well as name did not near him but they kept away from him. Even the kind hearts of his friends had forgotten him in due course to some extent - it could be assuredly said. Even then, he was getting an income of rupees five hundred per month. If only he had learnt how to get along with the world, at least to some extent, he could have got an income of rupees five thousand to six

thousand- ten times of his ordinary income. He had lost his chance.'

In such a context, Madhuri kindly took me one day to the artist who was then her lover and got me introduced to him. I never expected that, that day must have been the unlucky day for Madhuri on which day the misery started in her life. At the mere look of the artist at me some thing entered into me and spread within. Day by day the feeling got increased as our meetings too occurred often. It was a feeling of unison of hearts, the truth of which I had come to know only after some days. After some days I came to realise that his love for Madhuri had shifted towards me. When I realised it, I felt sorry a little bit. If only I had the state of mind then, as it is now, I would have felt sympathy for Madhuri. That sense of sympathy might have led me in the correct path. Immediately I would have realised clearly, what must have been my duty; I would have given up the association of the artist; and I would have let the loving heart of Madhuri to live on. But I had committed a grave blunder. Bothering the least for Madhuri, I increased my rendezvous with the artist. Both of us would visit libraries together; we would attend Art Festivals together; spend our time happily in parks; and enjoy viewing films together. In order to avoid and hide myself away from Madhuri, I had given up my connection with the Modern Women's Club completely.

On one occasion, I happened to see Madhuri at Howra Junction, who was coming from the opposite direction. My heart trembled. I was caught up, having no other place to hide myself. Madhuri with her chin up looked at me and stood still in front of me; on seeing the horrible look in her eyes, heavy breathing and her fluttering lips, I kept quiet, with my head bent down; and keeping away from her I walked aside. After I had reached a distance, I just turned and looked at her. She was still there standing erect, with her agitating heart and looking at me. I walked away to a distance, where her eyes could not reach. From then on, my hatred towards Madhuri grew up. I who was bound to protect her with sympathy, got prejudiced with her, developed enmity towards her and nurtured hatred for her. Thereafter, there were few

occasions when we happened to see each other; on such occasions I looked at her with enmity and hatred and walked away with arrogance.

In the meantime my mother fell ill. She would often tell that my marriage should be arranged; she would add that some how or other only after the solemnisation of my marriage she would die. As years rolled down I was getting old. If only I were a male child there was no need for concern. "For a girl child, marriage should be performed at the appropriate age. There were no seekers in large numbers for the aged girl; how could the marriage be conducted for the daughter here after?" - was the worry of my mother. Father realised her worry with sympathy; he took great efforts; he promised a hefty sum as dowry and brought a bridegroom. The bridegroom was a matriculation failed; however, my father one day repeatedly requested with me, rather pleaded me, that his educational qualification should not be a botheration for me. He came near my bed, sat by the side of my legs and prayed me and wept. I told him abruptly; "Dad, you need not at all worry about my marriage. I am a B.A. graduate. I have the will and ways to live by any means. Please do not worry about my future. In these days, one shall not worry at all for this". Only the agony of my mother made him to weep and plead with me like that- this was made known to me by my mother herself later. Thereafter the words uttered by my mother with tears rolling down from her eyes and sobbing throughout were very moving -I would not reproduce them here, because, it would be of no use. It would suffice, if I would tell that I behaved like an unsympathetic girl. Subsequent to that, my mother's life had departed; my father had renounced his wordily affections and filial bondage to become a *sanyasin*- these had been narrated by me to you earlier. I had not narrated the reason then for that; but other wise, I had told you every other details without omission".

Here the Professor intervened: "Yes, she had narrated earlier. When she had narrated that her face had appeared dull. I then thought, that it might be due to the misery about her breaved mother. I did not understand then that her guilt was hidden behind that".

I told myself that the art of talking in a cultured and civilised manner had developed to the extent of deceiving even a professor of psychology. I myself was very eager to read the letter further. I read it.

“Thereafter, as I had no other refuge than my elder brother’s house, it so happened that I had to go and live there under the protection and guidance of my sister-in-law (brother’s wife). A young parrot, even while it lived in the safe abode of the tree branches under the care and surveillance of its mother had been longing to fly high in the sky; if you catch it and put it in a cage, could you mitigate its yearning to fly high? My thirst for freedom increased unlimitedly. The artist-(the drawing master)- was always glad to welcome and receive me. The Registration Office gave us shelter in the name of Law. We rented out a house and started our married life. We lived happily. I pitied upon the girls who were unmarried, that when there were so many difficulties and hardships in life, why and how the circle of relations, the society, and the superstitious and blind beliefs were also intervening them posing hurdles in the life. To that extent our life was so happy. I also had ordered for new jewels and worn them happily. Neither Madhuri nor any other woman had stood before my happy life; but only my own intention and desire had stood across my path. If only I had learnt an expression from “Thirukkural” which runs as “ஆரா இயற்கை அவா”* that means “Desire has a nature; which is never to be satisfied”, and if only I had the meaning and content of that expression well founded in my heart in those days, my life would have been running along a course unchanged till this date.

Because I have written like this, kindly do not think that I was yearning and pining for that old life which I had lost. I humbly request you, I had never disliked the life I had lived with you; and I would never dislike it. I was blessed with a an excellent life, which was far

* ஆரா இயற்கை அவா நீப்பின் அந்நிலையே
பேரா இயற்கை தரும். குறள் - 370

Translation by Drew Lazarus : The removal of desire whose nature it is never to be satisfied, will immediately confer a nature that can never be changed.

Kural : 1-37-10

greater than my old life. In that aspect, it was a boon for me. I used to repeatedly think and melt within me for God had not punished me nor harmed me even though I had committed so many offences; He rather had condescended to grant me a boon in the form of your relationship. Why I had written like this? Because, my old blemish—that taint which was with me before Senthamarai, Thirukkural and your pure kindness had resorted to brush and remove away from me— should be known to you.

Had I not told you earlier that there were none who had stood across my path of happy life than my own desire? That was this. We had a measured income. There were no means to spend beyond a limit. I had to live an austere life, with economic limitations; we could not go to cinema houses often to view films; we could not often visit to hotels; we could not buy silk sarees of new designs now and then; and we could not rent out a big house to live comfortably in. We could not cross the break even point- what we earned, we spent. I could have got consolation for myself after seeing those people who had lesser income than us, and who had to deal with a lot of deficits. Would ever the mind behave to look at that view point? If only we were blessed with such a mind, we could have acquired the happy life very easily in this world. How could I know then that the lapse was the absence of such a mind which had turned many a family as hell whereas those should have been like Heaven? Was it not a fact that I had no friendship with good people like Sendhamarai? Therefore, I began to yearn for seeing the luxurious lives of rich men, and seeing their palatial buildings, gorgeous dress and jewels, circle of friendship and all other luxurious facilities and privileges. I regretted that I had married the artist; instead, if I had married one of such rich men I could have got such a luxurious life.

The Second World War had made several merchants to grow up sky-high and blessed them with to become very great wealthy people. The money flow, which swept the economy because of the consequences of war, did not make any change in the life of the artists and left them on the ground as such. Two of such merchants who had thus amassed wealth and had grown up to great

heights unexpectedly, stood rooted to my mind ever, and grew my yearning *one among those two merchants* was brought as bride groom by the efforts of my father to me when my mother was in death bed. Within few years he amassed great much of wealth. He built two massive buildings in Maha Nirvan Road in Calcutta. He was having two cars; he used to drive along the street where we resided with his wife and children exhibiting his pomp of wealth. The other man was a dealer in Pharmaceuticals and paints and varnishes. He enriched himself by turning the few lakhs invested by him into a few crores. A girl hailing from a very poor family, who was my classmate in B.A. had got married to him. He had studied up to eighth standard only and when I heard about that, I was surprised to know about her courage. After she became the wife of a very rich man she delved deeply into pomp and luxury. She would often come in search of me, and would talk to me. It would not have induced my concern if the woman who voluntarily came to me and talked to me had spoken about Gitanjali of Tagore; the devotion of Swami Chaidanya; the sacred preaching of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa; and the Heroic orations Swami Vivekanandha. Or else, if the lady had talked to me about the noble services of Rajah Ram Mohan Roy, the intellectual eminence of Ashtosh Mookerjee and the Leadership with self less sacrifice of Subash Chandra, my mind would not have spoilt. She would be talking proudly with self boasting about her costly food, dress and jewels etc. She would boast that the car she was having was the latest one; a brand new car which was precious; that the likes of the car are only with very few; perhaps, four or five persons in the city of Calcutta; and she would thus talk hours together about its special features. She would tell about the number of costly paints, emulsions and distempers which were applied for the walls of the new building built by them so that it should look shining. She would also talk about the specialty of the curtains hung in the windows, value of the floor mats and precious carpets, and the special extra comforts which were added in the bathrooms and bedrooms in her residence. Whenever he spoke about those things my heart would

pine and yearn more. She would often invite me to her bungalow. Whenever I went there I realised that what she had been describing about her residence was not false but hundred percent true. My longing grew up day by day. "If only I had married that merchant who was arranged to be my groom by my father..." this thinking evolved within me.

When something evolved within the mind as thinking, it won't take long before it would exit through the mouth. It might take few hours or few days- that was all. That kind of thinking would take shape of words and would come out - through the mouth. On one day I saw in the advertisement that a beautiful wrist watch was being sold. On that night I showed it to my husband and asked him to buy one for me. He told me about the limited position of our resources, and he asked me to have his wrist watch. I told him: "If only you would give up the profession of artist and engage in business you could earn more and we could live happily". He replied: "For this, you should have married some merchant"! I at once said: "In fact, my father arranged a groom for me: but it failed to materialise". I also explained to him in this connection about the business man who was in Maha Nirvan Road, he retorted: "Why didn't you marry him? Did you not have the clarity of conviction then?" I said, "Yes". That was all. We both stopped talking to each other. Only on the third day we talked to each another. But, our life, which was until then like a new cloth, thereafter became like a torn clothe stitched and draped. This was the basic reason for that. Dislike grew up and ramified. I should tell that the small plant grew into a big tree branching out in all directions. I nurtured hatred towards his profession of artist. He grew disliking in my dressing behaviour friendship, relationship and my customs and habits. I used to keep away from his friends; he started to prevent me from having contact and relationship with the ladies of rich families."

"At this juncture, I would recall what Ilango once spoke in Bombay later. On one evening Senthamarai and myself had gone to Tharavi to see the lot of poor Tamils

there. There were innumerable Tamils living there. Among them there were people who hailed from Ramanathapuram some two or three generations earlier; there were also people who hailed from Tamil Nadu and came there the previous month. As the area they live in was a slum area, the Municipal Corporation Commissioner had given them notice to vacate, citing that their slums caused an irritation to the sight and it marred the beauty of Bombay.

They had been allotted with an alternate site to be rehabilitated, which was at a far off place from the city, and they were compelled to resettle there. Senthamarai was very much concerned about the life of Tamils there; they were so undeveloped and depressed; that too, to the extent that they and their slums were cited as the cause which had irritated the sight, and marred the beauty of the city. I told her that if these hard working Tamils had not developed and progressed in these fifty or sixty years of their living there, and if they were seen to be lesser in their living standards than the living conditions of the Refugees * who had come over there recently, there must be some basic and fundamental flaws in the life of Tamils. Senthamarai told: "There were many flaws in them and the foremost among them was the absence of unity; they had immense capacity to go on splitting within themselves based on trivial reasons; and they were a lot with Jealousy unbound. These were the reasons for their little progress". When we uttered these words, we saw Ilango keeping quiet with out making any comment. When we came back to Matunga, it came up in my mind that the Tamils (who also hailed from Tamil Nadu) living here in Matunga, were leading a very good life of respect and resources. Therefore, I felt that Tamils had the capacity to shed off their short falls and progress. On that night, she insisted me to have the supper with them. According to her wish I ate with them. After we had our meals, while we were sitting together to chew betels, Senthamarai told that we

* The author has probably referred to here the exodus of refugees as a result of the Partition in 1947-48, and influx and spread of them into various parts of the country including Bombay.

should go to Tharavi weekly once and do our service there. On hearing this Ilango called it "a crazy idea." Then he started to give a long lecture.

"As long as we could not put an end to poverty such services would end up as 'infructuous efforts'; It might also end up in getting disgusted and fed up with those poor people; ultimately it might also end up in hating them. This would be like resórting to preach the mosquitoes and eradicate malaria instead of cleansing and improving the drainage system, which had stagnated. If the Government could not help enforcing "alleviation of poverty" at least they should resort to curb and prevent these luxuries and pomp. There could not be any other social evil or crime like allowing the existence of the lives of two different classes of society - the life of the rich and that of the poor. The law itself was the cause for the commission of this crime, in these days. What would happen because of that, you know? The sympathy now shown by those who are living in the higher strata of the society, upon the poor would get diminished. An opinion was also formed that 'high and low - rich and poor' in the society was but natural; that, differences could not be erased.' The concept that all were the children of God; a feeling of atheism that they belonged to a different creed, whereas we belonged to a different creed' would begin to grow. Thus, the rich people would begin to think and become bad. On the other hand, poor people were rotting in a different way. Because the pomp and luxury of life were in front of their eyes, they were rotting while longing for that; they were suffering without being able to know the goodness of the simplicity of life; they would spend what all they earn, immediately and indiscriminately; on the days when they had no money to spend, they would pick up quarrel by courting unnecessary troubles and disputes; and then become rogues and beasts. The mistake was not entirely on them. The mistake was with the law which had given room for the people who were born with equal rights to become great nuisance for each other. Firstly, the life of pomp and luxury should be curbed with by prescribing limits for it. Let them accumulate wealth in

cash only with out any ceiling; but, augmentation of wealth such as bungalows, houses, gorgeous dresses, jewels, festivals and conducting celebrations and parties etc should be prevented exceeding the limits prescribed for it. Diamond, silk and other luxurious goods manufacture should be prohibited; we should allow what were necessary for the growth and maintenance of a sound body; and seeking anything beyond that necessity should be prevented. Then only you can stop the yearning of the poor as well as the atheist thought of others. Otherwise, as the second alternative, you should segregate the rich from the poor; the rich should be allowed to live in one state and the poor to live separately in another state. We should do this so that by no means the poor people would rot in longing forever; and others would slip away cheating; and both would never have a chance to meet each other. Without doing this, if you go and engage yourself in service in slum areas there would not be any use in that."

When I heard his lengthy lecture on that night, I remembered the days in my life in Calcutta, which was spent in yearning and rotting for pomp and luxury. Even though I had forgotten the contents of the number of books read by me, I could never forget this particular speech by him on that day. Because, his speech on that night illuminated my life and gave new meaning to my life; he had actually guided me into a new path; unknowingly I nodded my head telling "that is true." My yearning to wards luxurious life...."

Professor immediately burst into laughter. I stopped reading the letter. "Occasionally such crazy ideas would flash in Ilango. Even when we both were school students, he would utter words like these as a mad man. Suppose, some of us could not sleep well, while others were in deep sleep, would you wake them up and disturb them from their sleep? His proposed scheme was like that. Would it be possible to implement a rule, which would prescribe that those who could sleep well should live in one house, and those who could not should live in another house?" said he.

I did not answer to his query and I continued to read:

"Only my yearning for the pomp and luxury of

life became poison to my happy life. There could be no doubt about that. This thought came up in my upper most mind during the last Pongal Festival. It was therefore, I myself made some changes in the routine of my life since last Pongal. You were asking me in the past eight months several times, why I had not worn that jewell; draped this saree; why I had stopped going to cinema often; and why I had cut short the sweet items. You had also advised me that I should not be so austere and thrifty. You had also quoted you experience in USA that pomp and luxury would give enthusiasm and energy to the heart of men. You laughed at when I reasoned out how simplicity in life would give peace of mind. I in later days used to keep without arguing because, I had realised that your mind would never change in this regard. The real reason behind that was this: that just as my life was spoilt by the pomp and luxury of others, no poor girl's life should fall prey to yearning and get decayed because of my pompousness. That night, I merely nodded my head on hearing the lengthy speech of Ilango. If only I had the clarity of vision now I have, not only by nodding the head, I would also have hailed his speech as excellent and congratulated him by words too; I would have thanked him on behalf of the entire women folk; I would have greeted him movingly from the heart.

Let it be gone, instead of narrating what had happened, I was explaining something else. There after, my heart began to fly far away from the artist. My staying at my brothers house under the guidance and surveillance of my 'Anni' ie. Sister-in-law, could well be compared with that of a parrot which was put in a cage made by bamboo splints. In that cage, there was some vent actually and I could instantly fly away into the outside world. It was "a tattered - cage." But, my life with MOHAN - yes that was the name of that artist - the life spent with him....."

My reading got interrupted. "Why?" asked professor. "So far she had not mentioned his name; only now, she had mentioned it." I said. "Whether his name was revealed out or not was immaterial. What were relevant were the incidents" he said. I controlled my excitement and continued to read further.

"The life spent with him did not appear as a cage made of bamboo splints; but it appeared as though it was made of iron wire rods. No escape to fly out of it route could be found. At times, I would think of getting divorce; immediately I would be reminded of the stringent laws. It would also come up in my mind that in Calcutta he was having a very large circle of friends than me and he was also having a circle of influence greater than mine. Divorce appeared to be elusive and not possible for me. Sometimes a flash of thought would occur in my mind that I might run away somewhere. "Where?" would be a big question coming before me and tossing me. When I was heavily perturbed with these thoughts on one evening, I was alone in the house lying in the bed; one man came and knocked at the door. He told me that he was coming from the General Hospital. He gave me a letter and went away. I just opened the letter and read it. It said that Mohan was knocked down by a car while he was proceeding along the road; he was grievously injured; and admitted in the hospital. On reading it I was grief-stricken. But my grief was short-lived. Immediately in my cursed mind there appeared a thought about getting freedom. If only he would die in that condition, a freedom unconcerned about divorce and stringent laws would come easily on the way automatically- thus thought my cruel and unsympathetic heart. Now I am ashamed of even to write about that. But on that day, I had behaved like a cruel woman without even going to the Hospital as requested by that letter. I remained at home, walking here and there like a ghost. Third day again the same person-messenger from Hospital-came and knocked at the door. He gave another letter and went away. I opened the letter and read the content. It was written in that there was no immediate danger for his life, there were bright chances to save his life if his mangled legs were amputated and removed. On seeing this letter my state of mind had become more disturbed than the previous day. If he would have his legs lost forever and would return home as a lame man, and If I happened to live on with him, there wont be any other disgrace in life than that – thus I was agonizing. Even after he became a lame man, the stringent laws and the circle of his friends would not sympathise with my

agonizing lot-this thought came up in my mind and it inflamed anger and deperation in me. Then later, it gave me courage too. I gathered my clothes; I took the money in the cash box with me. Instead of going to see and attend him at the General Hospital, I started to Bombay by the next train. That chapter of my life thus came to an end."

"After going through this, you would be wondering, whether it was Nirmala who had behaved thanklessly and unsympathetically. It was all quite unbelievable, indeed. My life too had changed unbelievably. The NIRMALA who was then, was entirely different, from the NIRMALA who is at present. She lived a life with the thinking that womanhood was nothing but good structure, fashionable jewels, and beauty. She was the wife of a Bengali artist who was engulfed in the world of art. She gave regard to pomp and luxury; she never knew what was sacrifice; and she was the old NIRMALA. This NIRMALA, the new one-had very well realized that apart from the beauty of a good body structure, why even more than that-the beauty of the mind was also necessary. This Nirmala is the wife of an intellectual Tamil who had gone deep into the sea of knowledge; she had learnt how to respect and reciprocate affection; and a lady well aware of the life. You would please condemn the old Nirmala; hate her and reject her. You had never seen her; even before you arrived at Bombay she was dead and gone. This Nirmala is sincerely and truly yours. You kindly sympathise with her; shower you mercy and grace upon her. Do not give her up. This alone is my request."

When I was proceeding to Bombay in train I had certainly an objective about my destination: I had decided to become a teacher in a school with the help of my B.A. Degree. I went to the Girl's School at Matunga to meet the Head Mistress, and I happened to meet Mrs. Senthamarai there. Earlier, I too had told you the sequence of incidents, which had happened thereafter; and I hope that lady would also have narrated what had happened. The teaching job which I had acquired through Thiru Ilango, paved way for leading a life in Bombay without concern. Not only that; the teaching profession acquired

me friendship of many Tamils. I was much interested in learning Tamil; and I had myself learnt Tamil and in others views I had changed myself as a Tamil.

I thought of getting united with you and live with you; and when you proposed to plan for moving to Chennai I just hesitated. You were a Tamil; I was a Bengali. I was very much hesitant to what extent Tamils would give me reception in their state; but, still I vividly remember, how Senthamarai intervened and pacified and motivated me to go to Tamil Nadu with impressive words of encouragement. She spoke: "You had been staying in Matunga for a considerable time; you had moved closely with Tamils; Even then, you still had wrong notions about Tamils! There were no other races in the whole of the country who would move with kindness and affection with people from other states. That, too, had not they shown utmost courtesy and kindness with the women folks from other states? You would go with the firm faith and belief that you were going to Tamil Nadu which was the motherland of Matunga Tamils!" As soon as I had arrived at here I had found that the opinion expressed by her was completely genuine. You had once expressed your anguish that other state people did not show the courtesy and kindness with Tamils. I had realized that also was true.

I was never given to understand that any of the Tamils here had commented wrongly about my living with you in Thiruvallikkeni. Would I be able to praise adequately the kind and respectable treatment meted out to me? The kind looks with affection from our neighbours and those in the opposite house; the courteous manner by which they would send us several kind of sweets and other eatables on festival days; their repeated visits and kind enquiries with concern for my health on occasions when I fell ill; their evincing of interest upon me with which their women folk would take me virtually by hand on special occasions in their respective houses; their generous view by which they treated me as one among them, without giving any importance to the differences of caste, religion and language. All these are my compliments

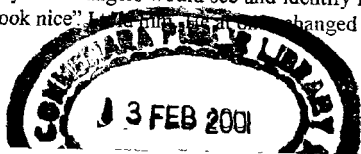
about the Tamil women alone: I need not elaborate about the magnanimity and good behaviour which are par excellence in the men folk among Tamils. Your students – particularly Mr. Kumaresan and Mr Thiruvengkattam had given me great respect and regard, treating me as their mother.

Thus when I had been living as a Tamil woman – as one among the Tamils – my craze for the art of drawings, which had been hidden for some time, had once again raised up; and therefore, the trouble also followed. Did you remember that I had been to the “Art Exhibition” which was held some ten days back? On that day itself my mind began to be stirred up. I saw several pictures and sculptures there. Among the pictures exhibited, four of them were declared to have won prizes. All those four pictures were not drawn by the so called prize-winning artists by themselves – which was a fact only known to me; and not to others. Mohan drew all those four pictures during those days when he was living with me happily and without prejudice, in Calcutta. They were superbly drawn; they were all well appreciated by all those friends there. After I went off to Bombay, who ever had entered into my house and whatever had happened to those drawings I did not know. Some how, those pictures were stolen from there, brought to Chennai and they had won the prizes. The person who had the propriety and moral rights did not get the prizes. Some one had stolen it and had got the prizes. What happened to the artist who ought to have got the prizes? What would be his position at present? Was not I too a reason for his neglected state? – When I was thinking about these facts my heart got crushed; its suffering was excessive. I was agonising without peace at sight; I just wandered with in my private room like a ghost; I was shattered to pieces blaming myself.

One among those four pictures, which had won the prizes, was drawn by Mohan keeping me as his model. He had asked me to sit as his model for that picture; he was narrating to me stories to heartily laugh and drew portrait as I was delighted by mirth laughing. If only you closely looked at it you could have discerned that the

laugh resembled mine. But, you had not come to the "Art Exhibition" the other day and you had stayed back at home.

I was also in another picture. That was not drawn keeping me as a 'model' but that was drawn by him keeping me in his mind. When we loved each other and when our love had grown to heights, on one particular day he came to hug me. I was struck with fear and bewilderment; I just kept away from him with that fear in me; I prevented him from advancing towards me; and looked at him with a little bit anger. He stood silently, staring at me; he stood there, motionless, and looked deep at me. I thought that I had hurt him by my act and felt very much for that and asked him: "Why are you looking at me like that?" He answered: "That 'posture and look' were very beautiful." "What posture?" I asked. "The posture – in which you prevented me, (with shyness), and the look (with love) – if only I could draw it as a picture it would be very very beautiful" said he. I had seen on that day that even while engaged in love-play, he had an overwhelming mind to picturise the beauty and bring the same in to art form. The eagerness to present everything in the art form was in excess with him than the eagerness to enjoy anything. We had our marriage solemnized in the Registered Office. On the next day morning he requested me, to look at him as I did the other day keeping away from him and preventing him to near me. I just laughed. I told him that there after it was not possible for me. He then said: "Though it was not possible for you, it would be possible for me. Even if you refused to show that striking appearance to my outward eyes, that posture was permanently portrayed already through my eyes of imagination in my mind; I would like to give it eternity – that it would last as long as the earth would exist and would be seen and enjoyed by one and all; I would draw it as a picture. The life could always be changing as it could not be a permanent one; but art was capable to capturing the changing impermanence and make it immortal." He had done it as he had told it. When I looked at it I felt shy. "If strangers would see and identify me, might not look nice" I thought. I had changed the



face as that of some other woman. I also saw that picture as one, which had won a prize in the Exhibition. I had the desire to buy it; but I was told that it had been sold to somebody already, by the person there. I returned home with disappointment.

Did not Mr. Thiruvengkam bring some pictures which were drawn by hand?"

Here I stopped reading and looked at the professor.

"It was not any particular reference about 'you'. You had not done any mistake. Go ahead" said he.

I said: "such a drawing was also present in the pictures I bought."

"That alone was pointed out by her in her letter. You please read ahead." I continued to read it aloud.

"It was there as one among the drawings brought by him. I thought, that even though I could not get the original one in the Art Exhibition, at least I could obtain the replica from him. Mean time, some thought in my conscious mind arose which questioned me the propriety for getting that picture; and which also chided me why should I be reminded of that thankless and unsympathetic life of mine through this picture perpetually. There arose another question from my conscience, which lamented. "Had you not destroyed the life of such a great artist?" Yet another question was posed from some other part of my mind, which rebuked me: "The Artist was the only person who could preserve your beauty for ever; you had hurt his heart and thus made the fountain of art to dry up". Unbearable with the turbulently perturbed mind, and without commenting upon those pictures, and also not without speaking any word with Thiruvengkam, I came back to my private room, bolted from inside and wept. After some time, my mind was cleared as it had calmed down.

I wanted at least to know about the place from where these pictures were bought and I returned to the hall just to enquire about it. I went straight to him and asked that question only. When I came to know from him that it was being sold in the platform at China Bazaar by a

roadside vendor, I wept in the heart that such a great artistic creation had come down to the level of being sold as a goods on the street. Fearing that if I happened to stand in the hall for some more times, the perturbed mind might become more painful, I at once returned back to my private room.

What would Thiruvankatam have thought in his mind about my behaviour that I had asked a question, obtained an answer, and abruptly turned back to my room instantly? The way in which I behaved was wrong. What could I have done? I could not control my emotions and behave calmly. Thirunathan who was the brother of Senthamarai once came to Bombay. He had then told that those who were caught up with emotions in excessive measure some times would struggle for words; they would be unable to behave in a civilised manner; and they would also commit mistakes. I myself have had this as my experience on many occasions. Only when Thirunathan pointed out and told me, I understood my own experience. Even though I have my face with me, I would need a mirror to look at it! Like that even though I knew my mind, I needed some body's advice to understand it."

Now, the professor intervened to say: "Normally, Nirmala would behave in a very cultured and civilised manner. On that day, I didn't know why on both the two occasions some kind of shadow was cast in her faces. I too noticed it. But I thought that it must be due to some physical illness. I was not aware of the fact that she was psychologically ill. After you took leave of me I called Nirmala. She came to me from her private room with a withering appearance; I asked her what was the reason for that. She told me that it was due to stomach pain. Thinking that it was usual with her I did not probe her further." I then continued to read the letter.

"After Thiruvankatam departed, you asked me the reason for my suffering. I told you that I was not feeling well: thus I tried to adduce some sort of reason to you for that. After you had gone out, I often recalled only the memory about that picture. Had only I asked it from him, Thiruvankatam would have given it to me. But I did not ask for it. I thought that I could at least buy it at China Bazaar from the place where he had got it. Day before yesterday evening I asked our driver Sekar to drive the

car to China Bazaar. We reached there and searched for the place where it was said to be sold on the street, opposite to High Court. I asked him to drive the car slowly. The picture was not available there; but the artist who had drawn the precious picture was available there! There was a sudden shock felt in my stomach. I could not even open my eyes to look at. Turbulent waves of fire rose up in my heart. The whole of my body trembled. The heartbeat was fast. Even I could not sit inside the car. I called out "Sekar..." but my voice did not rise; I felt some thing heavy was blocking the throat. My eyes saw the artist once again. I called out the driver, bending my head down, and closing my eyes with hands. He came in and sat in the driving seat. I told him that I was not feeling well; and I asked him to immediately drive it to Thiruvallikeni. It reached home straight and I entered into my private room; I was greatly perturbed and I wept aloud. I could not forget the memory even if I tried to do so. If only narcotics like opium or hashish was available then I would have taken it, with out considering its effects, and would have gone to deep psychotropic unconsciousness. Even if I had Toddy or arrack I would have drunk and forgotten myself. I confess that even if poison was available then I would have swallowed it willingly. Those memories had tortured and harassed me so much; to escape out by any means from the dreaded clutches of it, I writhed and trembled - but I could not. Neither in my room nor in the house there were any narcotics and psychotropic. I was so much fed up with the presence of coffee, tea and fruit juice in ample quantity- of what use would it be with or without them in the world? Thus I told myself with dejection.

On that night you showed great concern for my health; you called the doctor over phone to immediately pay a visit to me and also informed me about it. I asked you to call him back and stop him coming. Even while you were trying to contact him over phone, he had arrived. He examined me. Sleeplessness and allergy must be the reason for my discomfort, which would have led to the illness - was his diagnosis. He consoled, and said that he would send me the medicine required. He actually sent medicine

through his staff. You insisted me to take medicine. Having had no other got I took it with a suffering in the mind. You often woke up in the night and saw me. Whenever you happened to see, you saw me in a state of sleeplessness. Medicine could cure and correct the disorder in the body; could it ever cure the wound in the heart?

Thiruvalluvar has said the expression: “even as their shadow that leaves them not” * drawing comparison while he wanted to highlight some thing. My sufferings were also like that; it had followed me wherever did I go. Yesterday evening you asked me to go to Kilpauk to see the newborn baby of the Maths Professor at his residence there. After seeing the babe, and as I was returning, the car passed along the Corporation School there, where the poor folks of the slums, displaced by the flood were staying. To have a close look at them, as I was much moved with sympathy, I asked the driver to drive slowly. I felt later for asking so, because, that turned to be harming myself. The car was moving slowly. I was looking at them with sympathy. Alas! What great shock was waiting there for me! I stretched my hand to pluck a rose – but instead, not even the thorn of the rose – the sting of a venomous snake had struck me! My ‘sympathy’ thus ended in a loud scream. I saw the artist – MOHAN – among those poor people. I screamed aloud! The driver feared very much. He stopped the car and asked me the reason therefor. Those poor people flocked around the car. I asked the driver to drive the car fast. He told me that the doctor’s residence was nearby, and we could go there; he even insisted on that. But I refused to accept, asked him to drive straight and arrived at home.

As soon as I reached home, the struggling of my conscience had multiplied. Day before yesterday I saw the artist alone in the China Bazaar. But yesterday evening, I saw a poor young woman along with him. They were seen by me with all smiles as they were sitting,

* தீயவை செய்தார் கெடுதல் நிழல் தன்னை
வீயாது அடியறைந் தற்று (குறள் 208)

Destruction will dwell at the heels of those who commit evil even as their shadow that leaves them not. (Drew & Lazarus) (Kural - 1-21-08)

and talking together while facing each other. The very same artist, who was a very handsome youth; who possessed the excellence of art in abundance; who was separated from Madhuri by me, and who was made by me as my own, that man was then seen by me, along with a poor young lady draped in torn cloths! He is not my husband at present! However, was he not that 'artist endearing to me', for ever? A thorn pierced into my heart at the thought that it was I who had made my beloved artist to look thus, with an yearning, for the smile of a poor lady. My artist was capable of producing treasure of arts which would enthrall the lives of many: but, had I not made him to lead the life of a poor, and a destitute with uncivilised and uncultured appearance? I blamed and cursed myself for my guilty. Who else could he have expected except me when he was caught in an accident with grievous injury and got admitted in the Hospital? Would not he have eagerly awaited my arrival and kind consolation from me when the doctor announced about the proposed amputation of legs to save him? What had I, the worst sinner, done then? I killed the sense of gratitude! I destroyed the love! I gave up mercy and sympathy! I quit the scene becoming a demon of self-interest! I became the death knell to the life of an unmatched excellence of art! Thus, several spears of blames and accusations flew towards me and struck me! They wounded me indiscriminately. They repeated their performances piercing, penetrating and probing, making pot holes in my pitiable heart. I could not eat; I could not sleep. I could not even speak to you, freely with an open heart.

When I was writing this, I was expecting your arrival; but you had not yet arrived. I went near your table. There were many letters on the table. There was an Invitation printed in a special kind of glossy paper from U.S.A. I picked it up; my eyes looked at it. It was an invitation for the celebration of Gandhiji's birth day. It was coupled with a Function organised under the auspices of CTF Company. It would take place tomorrow evening, I understood. There would also be a dance performance with a Dinner Party arranged to take place at

the end. Therefore, I realised that tomorrow evening it might be after 10. P.M. you would be returning home. It came up in my mind that there were regular Express Trains running between Madras Central and, Nilagris, Bangalore, Cochin, and Bombay. I took courage to decide that I should quit the home, and that too, before any other idea would prevail over this decision. I had felt as though I had gained freedom some how or other. I hailed it as an appropriate way to mitigate my sufferings. When you entered home, I pretended as though I had a good sleep and had just got up from sleep. I had acted truly well, with out allowing my wounded heart to be felt by you. Immediately, I lied in the cot as though I was sleeping; involuntarily, I slipped into a deep sleep.

Early in the next morning I woke up from the bed; but then, I could feel that my firm decision of the previous day had a little bit loosened. I could not know the reason why the firmness in my heart just changed and had given way in morning. As the hours rolled on, confusion and perturbedness in creased. There were the routine affairs of the day to be attended to and events like the arrival and departure of servants and strangers; your conversation and other duties etc just brought down my sufferings a tittle, rather I should put it in this way – they just served to hide and conceal my sufferings, which would be apt. In the evening, you were starting to go to attend the Gandhiji's Birthday Celebrations; you invited me to accompany you; but I refused. Then, you went without a word.

Now I am alone and aloof here; the sufferings and anguish come up and onslaught me with the original vigour. I now realised that I could not bear it anymore. If only, my heart were to be the target of the onslaught of untold misery and unbearable agony for some more days my body would certainly perish soon. I had also the apprehension that I would loose my wit and I would become insane or lunatic. I was unable to speak to you at all. For all my present ailments – separation, alone would be a good cure, I firmly believed. My courageous decision of yesterday had once a again returned to me in the evening. I was taking with me just rupees eight hundred

only. Bank pass book and cheque book and all were left untouched; they were left as such in their appropriate places. I had called in a taxi in which I would start my journey. Kindly don't feel angry with me; nor hate me. A woman out of her ignorance, had committed a lot of blunders, and as a result of which she happened to suffer, reeling under the prick of conscience. In such a context, she had decided to get herself separated for some days; she would seek refuge in an unknown place, she would remain there unnoticed, and would perform penance in expiation of her sin. She would visit places least trodden by men and witness mountain, water falls and rivers through which she would imbibe inspirations from Mother Nature and try to get back her resources. A woman's heart was pining with unbearable agony; you would kindly bear with her and say 'Let her seek cure for her ailing heart'. It was my mistake that I had not sought your permission to leave. Forgive me, please. I would not be away in separation for long; I would come back in six week's time.

In the meantime, -it was painful even to think about, - if only your heart would hate me considering my old guilt, you would please keep quiet and do nothing; I would never venture to return back and be a nuisance to you. I would permanently seek the consolation that would be derived on seeing mountains, rivers and waterfalls, and I would end my life there.

Or else, if your heart would still have the affection and love to get me again, I humbly request you to do me two favours. One-you would please write a letter to the care address of Senthamarai at Bombay. Not now; but after five weeks, you should write; on the sixth week I would try to be there; then, If I would receive a letter asking me to come back, I would do so. Another one: you should allow me- rather you would gracefully permit me - to claim hereafter, that "Mohan is my beloved artist". You should also take some effort to remove the poverty in his life. The poverty of him should not be thought as the poverty of some unknown individual; it should be construed as the "illness that had gripped the art it self" and every effort should be taken to remove it - that was

the desire of my heart. I would also request you to henceforth forget those two conditions that I had imposed on you - and promises obtained from you- in Bombay. Here after, I would not at all require a separate room exclusive for me. When I had exposed to you my heart itself as a open book, where could be the necessity for getting hiding place for my things?

Once again I plead you with all obeisance, you would please forgive me, and bestow mercy upon me. I would request you, in the name of virtue, the greatest of all values, that you should accept me, as a woman of pure heart having been repented, reformed, and resurrected.

"Though others inflict injuries on you, yet, compassionating the sorrow- (that will come upon them)- it will be well not to do to them anything contrary to VIRTUE." * thus says Saint Thiruvalluvar in his couplet:

“திறன் அல்ல தன் பிறர் செய்யினும் நோநொந்து
அறன் அல்ல செய்யாமை நன்று”

Yours ever,
NIRMALA

There after, he remained silent for some time. I was also remaining calm. I was repeatedly looking at him, and the things around him. The servant was standing at a respectable distance, holding the letters got from the postman, who had just delivered it. On seeing him professor spoke: “bring them.”

He brought them with his face white large with worry and fear, and placed them on the table. Professor did not bother to get them opened.

He looked at me and spoke: “had only she asked me, I would have accompanied her, and travelled to those places, she had intended, remaining all these six weeks along with her, showing her the mountains, rivers and waterfalls.”

I did not speak.

He asked me: “Do you know that artist?”

* Thirukkural. Chapter-16-Couplet-7 Translation by: Drew & Lazarus

"Yes sir, I know him." said I.

"You had not told me about that all these days."

"I told you. Perhaps you would have forgotten."

"Who was that?"

"A lame man. He who lives in the low-lying place, in a slum, near Chetput railway track. He would draw pictures of line-drawings with a piece of charcoal."

"I now recollect that you had told me once, long back. Why should he go and mingle with those poor people?"

"No other go. Instead of facing a death due to starvation, would it not be preferable to live with available cold food!"

"Is that he person? You come and see" saying so he got up.

He went through the next room. I too followed him. He took the key and opened the room opposite to the Hall. "This is her private room" so saying so he entered into it; and opened the windows.

I looked with surprise here and there. There were a few lines drawn by charcoal on the floor. There was a table on the eastern corner, and upon it we saw a beautiful picture, drawn by hand. It was the figure of a very handsome young man, full of youth and vigour. Soft fingers, handsome face and sharp look were telling clearly that he was an artist. Under that drawing, there was a name signed in English – "MADHURI".

"Is that he?" asked the professor.

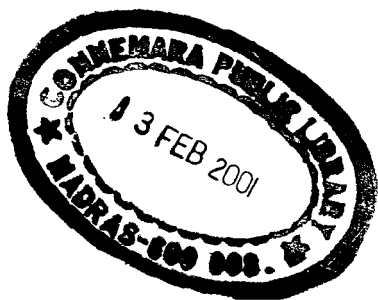
"No" said I.

Once again I saw the lines drawn by charcoal on the floor of the room. They had not brought out any figure, but simply remained as empty lines.

Once again I saw the picture drawn by Madhuri. It appeared as though there was another picture behind it, just placed along with it. "What is there, behind it?" I asked.

He took up the picture drawn by Madhuri in his hand. There was another drawing kept there. My eyes were shocked to see it. "That is he" I said. It was the very same Mohan, who appeared in this picture, but as a lame man – a personification of poverty – with no cloth on his upper body,

with grown-up moustache and beard, and the hair left unkempt. I looked at both the pictures alternatively. It became clear that the "handsome young man" drawn by Madhuri and the Lame man were both one and the same. I gave a close look on the table where these two pictures were kept. On a corner of it, there was a costly brush used for drawing. Adjacent to that, there was also a piece of charcoal. My mind at once thought of Ponni; my mind thought about her hand – affectionate hand – which was just picking up and arranging in rows, charcoal bits that could well be used for drawing, with abiding interest.





"Just as it was a criminal offence
to deprive other's rights
it was equally a criminal offence
to keep quite doing nothing against it
and to be a mute spectator when
others cause the deprivation of our rights

- Dr.M.VARATHARASANAI

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